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MISS TOMMY

A MEDIÆVAL ROMANCE

BY THE AUTHOR OF

JOHN HALIFAX, GENTLEMAN

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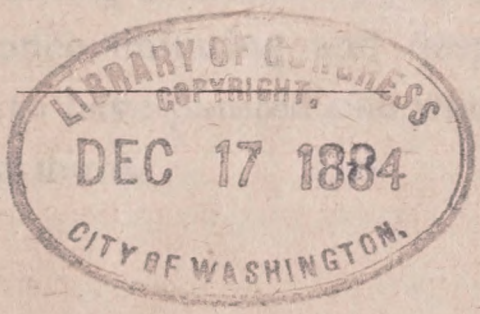

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PREFACE.

In the exciting blaze of modern fiction the glowworm light of this simple and old-fashioned story almost seems to need apology; except that it is, in degree, a true story; and truth is always worth something. My heroine really lived; about half a century ago; she was very beautiful and charming; her name was Thomasina, and she was generally called "Miss Tommy."

Perhaps, in these days, when so many women disdain to be such—contemning domestic life, and, by a curious contradiction, at once imitating and despising men, it may be excusable to have painted one who was "only a woman"—nothing more.

MISS TOMMY.

PART I.

"You should call her Thomasina," said I, as I held in my arms a friend's first baby, whose dear and honored father bears the old-fashioned name of Thomas, though suppressed into an initial.

"Thomasina?" repeated the young mother with polite hesitation. "Isn't it a—rather a long name? And if it were shortened—fancy her being called 'Tom' or 'Tommy'!"

"Why not? The most charming woman I ever knew was named Thomasina, and all her life was called 'Miss Tommy.'"

While I spoke the old days came back upon me—the days when I was a girl, who am now a middle-aged mother. I saw her clear as if it were yesterday, my dear "Miss Tommy," whom I loved with a kind of passionate admiration, such as a girl often conceives for an elderly woman, and which she returned with the tenderness that warm childless hearts give, and are glad to give, to other people's children.

She rises up before me now—her pale, pure face, her small, dainty figure, her gentle way of moving and speaking, and her dear little soft hands—she had such pretty

hands to the very last. But her beauty was not obtrusive. You might be in the room with her for ever so long and not notice Miss Tommy, till you came and sat beside her —found her out, so to speak ; and then you were never likely to forget her. I never did, from the first hour when I made her acquaintance.

It was in a ball-room, of all places in the world—a London ball-room. I was sitting in a corner, dull and silent, refusing to dance, for the only one I had cared to dance with had just gone off to India, and as I was only nineteen and he two-and-twenty, our parents would not let us be engaged ; they said we would change our minds half a dozen times during the three years that he was to be away—which might have been true, though it wasn't. So I wore the willow, half in sorrow, half in anger, for Charlie Gordon's sake, and thought myself the most miserable and ill-used girl in the world.

Everybody — that is, the "everybody" of a large family and a circle of affectionate friends—knew of my griefs and my wrongs. Some blamed, no doubt, and some sympathized, for Charley was a universal favorite. He was away, luckily for him, and out of it all ; for me, I bore my heart-break as best I could, and tried to wear my willow—rather ostentatiously, but with a dignified grace which raised me very much in my own opinion, and even afforded me a certain consolation.

I can smile at myself now, at the folly of supposing that the whole order of things was to be turned upside down to make two lovers happy—two creatures, young and foolish, with not a half-penny between them. And yet I am a little sorry for my old self too, for it was a very honest self, and its pain was a very real pain. I should not like to inflict the like on my own children without serious cause.

Enough of this, however, though it is not so much outside my story as it appears to be.

I had been sitting, silent and sullen, watching the couples waltzing round, and declining every partner who came up to me, with a scarcely civil negative — they were decent young men enough, but, oh, so inferior to Charlie !—when I heard some one beside me say, in a gentle tone, "Do you dislike dancing ?"

It was a small and rather elderly lady—a "wall-flower" like myself—but with such a beautiful face, and such a pretty dress—a dove-colored silk trimmed with rich old lace. But her toilet was not of the youthful style that the London ladies of her age made themselves look old and ugly in—nay, might even have been called "provincial" had it not been so very suitable and graceful. Who she was I had no idea, and yet, as the ball was in my aunt's house, I knew nearly all the guests. And I might have resented this question from a stranger, but for the exceedingly gentle way in which it was put. I did not answer it, however, and the lady continued:

"I think I have seen you before, Miss Murray, but you were quite a little girl then. It is some years since I visited your aunt, for I seldom come up to London. My home is at Dover."

"Dover !" It was the place dear Charlie's last letter was dated from. "Do you know Dover, and—and the regiments stationed there ?" I eagerly asked.

"No ; I am an humble civilian," said she, with a quiet smile. "I have no military connections. But the other day I watched a regiment leave for India—the —th."

It was Charlie's own. And by her way of looking down and not at me, and by a certain tender intonation in her voice, I was sure she knew about me and Charlie. Perhaps she was sorry for us. I grasped her hand.

"Indeed, I ought to know you, to remember you; but I forget your name."

"I am Miss Trotter—Thomasina Trotter—sometimes called 'Miss Tommy.'"

She laughed and I laughed, which prevented my crying—which I was ready to do. To think of this little old lady having had the last precious glimpse denied to me—the sight of my Charlie before he sailed!

"Miss Tommy! What a funny name! I must tell it to—" And then the thought that I had now no Charlie to tell anything to, for our parents would not let us correspond, came upon me with such a pang that I could hardly keep back the tears.

Miss Trotter touched my hand softly, and then stood up in front of me, as if admiring the dancers, till I had recovered my composure.

"I beg your pardon. I ought not to be so silly; but, oh!"—here my grief burst out—"he is just gone to India, and that was his regiment you saw, and—if you had ever known Charlie Gordon——"

The old lady—she seemed old to me who was nineteen—started slightly, and a sudden color flushed all over her delicate features. "My dear," she said, taking my hand, "I did not know this Charlie Gordon, but from all I hear of him I can imagine that his friends must miss him sorely. And to part with any one dear to us, for a long absence abroad, with all the chances and risks of absence, is"—here her voice faltered—"is a hard thing."

Then she did know all. How I blessed her for her kind words!

"But," she continued, suddenly brightening, "let us hope he will come back safe and sound, and—just the same."

Yes, she did understand. I, who thought my love

affair the most important affair in the world, was grateful to the old lady, and felt that I could have loved her in spite of her ugly and vulgar name, "Miss Tommy Trotter." Who could she be? I had never heard of her; but then my aunt had a large circle of friends outside our circle, and for many months past my interests had narrowed down to one person. I cared little for anybody that was not connected with Charlie.

I should soon have poured out into her sympathizing bosom the whole story of me and Charlie, but for the unromantic intervention of supper, to which some one took her in, and she disappeared. I might have forgotten her altogether, for in my preoccupied state of mind I was apt to forget both people and things, everything but Charlie, had not my mother one day, sitting by my bed-side—I had fretted myself at last into real illness—said suddenly:

"Decie" (being the tenth, I had been christened Decima), "where did you meet Miss Tommy Trotter?"

"Miss Tommy Trotter?"

"An old friend of your aunt's, now staying with her. She was asking kindly after you, and sorry you were ill. She also said, as you had been ordered sea air, and as it is so inconvenient for me to leave home, if I would trust you to her at Dover——"

"Dover? Yes, I will go. Please let me go at once," cried I, with an eagerness that must have given a pang to my tender mother, with whom I had steadily refused to go anywhere. But she had already learned, as mothers must, that there had come a time when even she could not make her darling happy. Years after, when she slept peacefully "under the daisies," I found out by my own experience how miserable I must have made my poor mother in those days.

"Very well, dear," was all she said. "Miss Trotter, your aunt tells me, is a most sensible woman, and will look after your health. And you will have sufficient comforts, even luxuries, for she is a lady of fortune, inherited from her uncle, Mr. Thomas Trotter; a most respectable man, but not quite a gentleman; in fact, a tailor—an army tailor."

We Murrays are proud of our blue blood, and since I had known the Gordons I was prouder still. For a moment I hesitated, and wished I had not so readily consented to visit a tailor's neice.

"But she looks and speaks like a gentlewoman, Miss Trotter herself——"

"And she is a gentlewoman, or your aunt would not have kept up acquaintance with her. She first heard of her through a mutual friend, who said the Trotters were always 'quite respectable.'"

"What friend?"

"Major Gordon," my mother answered, hesitating, for that was Charlie's old uncle in India. His name turned the balance. I was now determined to go to Dover. In truth, I would almost have gone anywhere to get away from home.

Two days after—for I rose from my bed and packed my things myself the very next day, as if I had never been ill at all—two days after I found myself breathing the salt air, and gazing across the stormy ocean which had carried away my Charlie. Indeed, the first walk I insisted on taking was to the pier-head, where his dear feet, in those lovely military boots about which he was so particular, had last touched English shores. To be sure, that sacred spot was now occupied by a burly sailor, who, from his huge boots to his old sou'wester, formed a striking contrast to my Charlie; still, I viewed him

with tender interest; and there, with the sea-breeze blowing my tears away, and the bright winter sun—if the winter sun shines anywhere, it shines at Dover—making me feel hopeful in spite of myself, I told Miss Tommy my love-story from beginning to end. We were keeping the carriage waiting at the pier-head all the time, but I never thought of that; in those days I was not in the habit of thinking much about anybody except myself and my sorrows.

Miss Trotter listened to them with great patience, though with not quite so much mournful sympathy as I had expected. In fact, when I had finished, she actually smiled.

"The end? No, my dear; I cannot call it the end yet: you are but nineteen. And now, as it is a little chilly, what do you say to our going home to tea?"

I did not care for tea—not I! I would much rather have driven up and down the pleasant esplanade, to watch the sun setting behind the heights and throwing his last glimmer on Dover Castle, where Charlie had spent those few sad last days, thinking of me (at least I hope so). But my companion said gently, though decisively, "We must go in"—and we went in.

The house was not near so grand as I expected, from what I had heard of Miss Trotter's large fortune. Eight hundred a year or so—I was trying to grow learned about incomes—would have kept it luxuriously. It was a very pretty house, sitting—to speak metaphorically—with its back under the cliff and its feet to the shore, a little garden alone parting it from the sea; indeed, in very high winter tides the waves actually washed into the flower beds, creating much destruction, which, however, was always repaired by spring. For it was such a sheltered, sunshiny nook; and the rooms, though small, were most

daintily and tastefully furnished: the whole atmosphere within and without was so redolent of cheerful peace, that on entering I gave a great sigh of satisfaction, and wondered if Charlie had ever seen it.

"I really cannot say," replied my hostess, smiling, "not having had the honor of Lieutenant Gordon's acquaintance. And

'How should I your true-love know
From another one'

of the many young officers who walk up and down here? Dover town is all dotted with bits of scarlet: and—hark! there is the bugle—we are quite a military community, you see."

"I am so glad!" For it warmed my heart and made me happy—being "a lass that loved a soldier," and fain to cast my lot with him for good or ill. Silly enough and yet——

Miss Tommy regarded me with a curious, tender kind of observation, till the smile on her lips melted into a half-sigh. She turned away and began making the tea, which she always did with her own hands, despite her well-appointed household of servants—women-servants only. There was apparently no butler in her establishment; and though the carriage we had just stepped out of was exceedingly comfortable, there were no footmen in livery behind it. We had to open and shut its doors ourselves. Altogether, even on this my first day at Miss Trotter's house, I was much struck by the total absence of show and formality; by refinement without lavishness, and comfort without luxury.

"An old maid's house," as she placidly called it, hoping I should be happy therein. Could I? Are old

maids ever happy? Which of course I disbelieved, at nineteen. After many more years' experience and observation of life I incline to reconsider my verdict.

Even now—to me who had just gone through a great domestic convulsion, to say nothing of the small tempests in teapots that were always brewing in our numerous and tumultuous family—the exceeding repose of the maiden household I had dropped into, where nobody squabbled and nobody "fussed," was most soothing and pleasant.

It was, of course, a silent house—no children running about or girls singing up and down the stairs; but when one has had rather too much of domestic noise, silence is agreeable for a time. And it was a small house, much smaller than I had expected—which, perhaps, in some youthfully incautious manner I betrayed, for Miss Trotter said, in the course of our tea-dinner—not a regular late dinner at all:

"I hope, my dear, you will be able to make yourself happy here. You see, I live quite simply. Where would be the use of anything else? There is only myself. One cannot eat more than one dinner, or sleep in more than one room, at the same time. Still," she added, with that curiously bright smile she had—a mixture of pain struggling with pathos, like a person who had tried to be happy all her life in spite of circumstances—"still I must own that I like a nice dinner and a pretty room."

"And certainly you have them," I answered, with a full sincerity that evidently pleased her.

"Yes, I think this is pretty," said she, glancing round the room and out of the window, where the last gleam of sunset was shining on the distant sea. "Sycamore Hall, my uncle's place in the country, is much larger

and grander, and I have to live there in summer-time, and I try to keep it up properly, but I like my little Dover house much better."

Here the conversation ceased, for I felt it awkward. In her place I should have ignored as much as possible this defunct tailor-uncle—"quite respectable" as he had been termed by Major Gordon; but Miss Trotter referred to him and to his Sycamore Hall—no doubt a mansion full of coarse and vulgar splendors—as calmly as she did to her own small house and simple way of living. She must be an "odd" sort of person, I thought, and very different from the people among whom I had been accustomed to move—"our circle," as my sisters sometimes called it.

Miss Trotter, as I found out in course of our talk, had no sisters, no relations at all. She was, in the full sense of the term, a solitary old maid, yet the least like an old maid, and, as I soon discovered, the least solitary, of any lady I ever knew. For a "lady," even in my sisters' reading of the word, no one could doubt she was, in spite of her uncle the tailor.

She devoted herself to me with a cordial politeness, though mingled with occasional fits of what appeared to me like shyness, for the whole of the first day, for I was very tired, and perhaps just a trifle cross—"depressed," as I called it—and, like many another young goose, I had come to consider depression—that condition in which one sits dumb and dogged, with downcast eyes, and cheek leaning on one's hand—as rather a virtue than not. It took all my hostess's kindly pains to rouse me from it, by talking to me and showing me the town of Dover—that dear, old-fashioned town, which I shall always love to the bottom of my heart.

It has changed little since those days, or, indeed,

since days long before then. In its narrow streets and quaint back alleys you may still come upon bits of Roman brick-work, mediæval stone-work, and solid last-century wood-work. The place is full of relics interesting to the archæologist, from the time of Julius Cæsar upward. You, continental travellers, rushing through it, and you, fashionable diners at the "Lord Warden," have no idea how picturesque Dover can look, with its quaint, foreign-like Snargate Street, its old-world Castle Street, with a noble view of the Castle framed in at the end, and finally the Castle itself, which Charlie had told me about, and which I was so eager to see—walking about the embattled rock, up and down steps, and in and out of fortifications, with feet as active as if I had never been ill.

In truth, I did not feel very ill, the air was so pure and invigorating, the sense of freedom and hope so strong, and the little old lady by my side was such a bright companion, taking such a hearty interest in everything about her, including me. For I could see that I, Decima Murray, really was an object of interest to her, at which in my youthful conceit I was not at all surprised, nor at the unwearied patience with which she listened to my endless references to my sorrows—of course, the most important subject in the world was that of Charlie and me.

I was, however, "taken down a peg," as Charlie would have said, when, after breakfast on the second day, Miss Tommy rose at once.

"Now, my dear, I must leave you to amuse yourself. Being rather a busy woman, I never attempt to entertain my guests. Here are plenty of books and music; and there is the shore—it is very pleasant sitting on the shingle in front of the house, if you have nothing else

to do; dinner is at one; and the carriage will be round soon after two, and——"

She went on to outline the day and my duties in it, making me out to be a mere portion of the household life, instead of the pivot upon which it all turned. Not very flattering, but she did it so naturally and cheerfully that one could not be offended.

"I hope you will not be dull, my dear. My young guests seldom are, and I have a good many from time to time. It is very pleasant to an old woman to have a girl in the house. They help me, too, in many ways."

Now, I had never been accustomed to help anybody. I always expected everybody to help me. Being the youngest, and the beauty of the family, from the time I left school I had idled about in great enjoyment. From the choosing of a dress to the sewing on of a glove-button, everything had been done for me, and I had no mind to change this order of things. I was no longer a light-hearted girl, but an ill-used woman and an interesting invalid. So I tacitly ignored the suggestion of my being useful, and began killing time, ornamentally, in my customary way.

Still, after a while this became rather monotonous, especially when I saw my hostess busy day after day, occupied from morning to night with duties domestic and duties social; for she had evidently a large circle of friends, in which she was an important element—a rich single woman always is. Even when she found time for a brief chat with me, she had always her knitting or sewing at hand, to work while she talked. Our two hours' drive every afternoon for the good of my health was, I think, the only portion of the day in which I ever saw her idle.

I wondered at her. An elderly woman, and an old

maid too, for whom life was over—or, rather, for whom it had never begun, for what is life without love in it? —how could she be so cheerful? For cheerful she invariably was; not with any exuberant spirits, but with a quiet under-current of placid gayety, that I—shall I say I envied? Not exactly. Sometimes I almost pitied her for having had either no heart at all or no use for one; and I hugged my grief, turned away from the sight of Miss Trotter's bright face, let my listless hands drop idle on my lap, and sat and mourned for Charlie.

"Are you not sorry for me?" I asked one day, when we had been sitting talking as we drove; at least, I had talked, and all about myself, of course. So preoccupied was I that I never noticed all the beauty of ocean and sky, Walmer Castle, St. Margaret's, and the Goodwin Sands—that smiling, glittering expanse of sea where many a ship has gone down. "Surely you must be sorry for me?"

"Yes, very. But," after a pause, "not exactly for what you suppose."

"Not for being parted from Charlie? Why, I am the most unhappy girl in the world."

"Are you?" she said, smiling. Then suddenly changing into seriousness, "No girl can be considered 'the most unhappy girl in the world,' be her love ever so unfortunate, if she has loved, and if the object of her affection has never been unworthy of it."

"What, not if she was torn from him, as I from Charlie? or lost him in some way—if he died, or—married somebody else?"

Miss Tommy (I like to call her thus) sat silent, her little hands folded over her muff, and her eyes looking straight forward with a sort of wistfulness in them—those sweet brown eyes, so merry, bright, and clear!

"Different people, my dear, have different opinions, and yours may not agree with mine. But I think, and I have always thought, that, if a girl has a real true affection—I will not say a passion, which is a selfish thing, but a devotion, which is the most unselfish thing on earth—and has the strength to keep to it, nothing can ever make such an attachment 'unfortunate,' except the man's sinking so low that to love him becomes worse than a folly—a degradation. But I must not become didactic," added she, with a sudden change of tone and manner. "If there is a thing that frightens young people, it is preaching—I never preach."

That was true. If I had now and again felt so ashamed of my idleness that I seriously contemplated asking her to give me something to do, it was not because she ever told me I was lazy; only, contrasted with her busy life, I began to see the fact only too plainly.

"My love for Charlie could never be a degradation," I replied with dignity. "He is the best of men. Indeed, the Gordons are all honorable men. His father is long dead, killed in battle, as you know"—of course, I supposed everybody to know and remember every small fact connected with Charlie—"but his uncle and godfather is, he says, quite a *preux chevalier*, a Bayard, a Don Quixote, as they call him in the family. You must have heard of him. Perhaps you know him?"

"Yes."

And then I remembered it was Major Gordon who had vouched for the Trotters being "respectable." Probably the departed Thomas Trotter had been his tailor. I felt a little shy of the subject. To me the idea of a tailor in the family was as bad as a sheep-stealer; worse, indeed, for I could quite sympathize with Charlie when he told me of his ancestors the Border chieftains, "sev-

eral of whom were hanged, and a good many more ought to have been." But a tailor! I turned away my eyes from my companion's sweet face, and contemplated Dover Castle in the distance; would have changed the subject, but Miss Trotter evidently had no intention of avoiding it.

"I knew Major Gordon when he was a young man," she said. "He first made acquaintance with my uncle in the way of business, and then he met my father, who was a country clergyman, and a very clever man. He came often to our house at one time."

"And you know him still. What is he like?" I asked, eagerly; for anything or anybody connected with Charlie was interesting to me.

"Yes, I may say I know him still; for he is not one to neglect an old acquaintance. I have seen him every time he has returned to England."

"That has not been very often. Do you know—have you ever heard—" I stopped, remembering the "skeleton in the house," which Charlie had confided to me. "Did you ever see—his wife?"

"Yes; she was a very beautiful woman—a good deal older than he."

"And was she bad or mad—or what? Did she run away from him, or was he obliged to shut her up? Charlie did not know; nobody did know, he says. Poor Major Gordon was always quite silent both as to his sorrows and his wrongs. But it does not matter—she is dead now."

"Dead!"

"Yes; she died six months ago. Charlie said his uncle might possibly be coming home soon; but he hoped—and I hope too—it would not be just yet, till he himself had reached India. An uncle of Major

Gordon's high character would be so very useful to Charlie."

"Yes," answered Miss Trotter, rather vaguely; and then the conversation dropped. Nor—in spite of my anxiety to get as much out of her as I could respecting this uncle and namesake, upon whose will and power to help Charlie, by promotion or otherwise, depended so much of our future—did I succeed in eliciting any more facts about Major Gordon. Indeed, I soon came, perhaps hastily, to the conclusion that there were none to discover; that the acquaintance between them had been so slight, and renewed so briefly, and at such long periods, as to leave nothing to talk about.

At any rate, Miss Trotter would not talk, either about his personal appearance, which Charlie had said was "so queer," or his income, or his relations with his unfortunate wife. She just answered my questions as briefly as civility allowed, and spoke of something else. In this, as in most other matters, I soon found Miss Trotter disliked "talking over" things. If she was an old maid, she was an old maid not given to gossip.

As time went on—my visit extending from days to weeks—I almost forgot she was an old maid. She had such motherly ways with the heaps of young people who were perpetually haunting her house, making it anything but a dull house; and she moved about it so brightly and actively, with her little, light figure and her pretty face—I think small women keep young much longer than big ones. Miss Trotter seemed to me to grow younger and younger every week; there was a sunshine in her smile and an elasticity in her step; and then her complexion, that "*crux*" of elderly ladies, was kept so fresh and fair by her simple, regular life, her busy habits and placid mind, that sometimes, to

call her, as she always called herself, "an old woman," seemed quite ridiculous.

And then she had such a young heart. She would laugh like a child over a funny story, cry like a child over a pathetic book. But she was not sentimental. By and by, whenever I began talking of my woes, she adroitly changed the conversation, gave me something else to think about—something to do. Doing, not talking, was her characteristic. She was decidedly a woman of few words. She said she "liked thinking best;" and whenever we were together, after we had grown familiar with one another, there used to come long pauses of busy silence, during which, fast as our fingers moved—for I at last condescended to work too—we scarcely interchanged a single word.

Sometimes, when I got tired of thinking, even about my Charlie, I used to wonder what in the world Miss Trotter was thinking about—what she could find to think about, old as she was, and with no Charlie. Once I asked her.

She colored up, almost as vividly as I should have done had I been thinking of Charlie.

"What do I think about, did you say? Why, my dear, I can hardly tell. I have always been a rather meditative person, and during my life I have had a good deal to think of, and a good many people too. That was when I was very poor; it is not likely to be different now I am rich."

"Are you very rich?"—a question that would have been impertinent were it not so silly. But I meant no offence, nor did she take any.

"I have enough for all I want or wish, my dear; and after that, enough, thank God, to give to a few others what they want. So I pay back in my old age the debts

of kindness of my youth. And I rejoice in my riches, even though they are often a care."

"A care! How can that be possible?"

Miss Trotter turned, with a rather sad look in her eyes. "Decie, if you were wearing a warm cloak, and saw another, or several others, standing in the cold all in rags, yet knew not how to amend things, would you not sometimes long to take off your delightful silks and furs? But I am talking nonsense. All I mean to say is the very trite remark, 'that we all have our cares.'"

"Yes, indeed!" I reverted to mine, and bemoaned for the hundredth time the cruel fate which divided me from Charlie, and behaved, or misbehaved, myself as love-sick young people so constantly do, to the grief of their parents, the annoyance of their relations, and the ridicule of their friends.

But Miss Trotter neither laughed nor was angry. A little quiet smile was all she indulged in.

"My dear, the separation is only for three years, till you are twenty-one and he twenty-four—no very great age. And some lovers have been parted for a whole lifetime, and had to bear it. Do you think you are the only person who ever suffered? If you knew the sad stories—many of them love stories—that I have listened to for the last thirty years. Yet—I listen still."

"It is very kind of you." And it began to dawn upon me that she was very kind—this busy, active, maiden lady, with every hour of her day, every corner of her kindly heart, as full as it could hold—to listen to *me* in my self-absorbed grief, which seemed, in my morbid fancy, to be the only sorrow in the world. "But these others; what has become of them all?"

She answered softly,

"'Some are married, some are dead,'

as Longfellow sings, in his 'Old Clock on the Stairs.' Life always goes on to the same tune, 'Forever—never! Never—forever! and sometimes, strange to say, the 'never' creates the 'forever!'"

Though I did not take in her meaning, her manner rather surprised me, and the voice, though calm, had a tone of sadness in it. Could it be that she understood, of her own experience, the pain I was enduring? that she—this bright little middle-aged woman, so full of thoughts for others, living such an active, useful, happy life—had ever "loved and lost?" There was a tradition, my aunt had said, that Miss Tommy Trotter had once been the belle of the neighborhood, and had refused at least twenty offers. But she was an old woman now, and I, with the favorite belief of the young, that the old never feel anything, and being preoccupied with my own affairs, put the question aside. A minute or two after, we were both laughing so merrily at some accidental remark she made that I forgot all about it.

One of Miss Tommy's strongest characteristics was her keen sense of humor. Not that she was at all that very doubtful personage, a female wit, but she dearly liked to be merry, and had a talent for seeing the comic side of things. I one day told her she would "create a joke upon the ribs of death," as Shakespeare says.

"Well, and if I do!" she answered. "One must bear things somehow, and it is better to bear them with a laugh than a moan. Besides, an innocent joke is like a life-boat, it often carries us over the roughest seas."

That, I often thought, was the reason young people liked her company. She was so amusing, as well as sympathetic. She had always a cloud of girls about her—young men too, though there were not many at Dover. But, on the whole, I think she did not care for men.

She won great deference from the other sex, but she never flattered them, nor was put into any great flutter of felicity by their attentions, as I have seen young and old maids too betray. Perhaps she saw their weak points a little too plainly to be universally adored, in spite of the twenty traditional wooers, of whom she was said never to have encouraged one.

So time passed on. My stay extended from weeks to months, for I was not wanted at home; probably, as I now think, they were glad to get rid of me, for I could not have been pleasant company to either my mother or my sisters. But Miss Trotter endured me—made the best of me. I grew stronger in health and less morbid in mind. Now and then, instead of weeping, I caught myself laughing as I had never laughed since Charlie went away.

He had now been gone six months. The winter was over, the spring was fast coming on. In the lengthening twilight we used to walk up and down the shore and watch the sunset colors of the sea, and make plans for taking drives inland to see if the hedges were beginning to bud, and from what sheltered nooks came those baskets of primroses which little dirty girls and boys were daily offering to us, with a pathetic entreaty that Miss Trotter found irresistible, as well the little villains knew.

"Those primroses must be growing somewhere," she would say, sententiously. "We must go and look for them."

But still we never went, for the bitter east winds—the one only fault of Dover—made driving difficult. We liked to spend every afternoon in walking up and down the shore, not seldom wandering on to the Admiralty Pier, then newly begun, to watch the workmen there, and to see the Calais boat come in.

This was—and maybe still is—the great amusement of Dover, especially on rough days. Miss Tommy and I used to laugh over the innate cruelty of human nature in going to watch the landing of miserable foreigners or returning Britons who had been unwise enough to trust themselves away from our happy island. Many an "odd fish" we saw and smiled at, and many an invalid at whom we did not smile, for the homeward route from the East was then often by Calais and Dover, and everything Indian had the deepest interest for me. My companion too —sometimes I saw her kind brown eyes fixed with the most earnest inquiry upon some sallow-faced, sickly passenger—perhaps a liver-tormented cross old Indian, burned up with years of hot climate and brandy pawnee. Would Charlie ever look like that? Could I imagine him with a dried-up, bronzed, unlovely face, like those faces which made Miss Tommy stop her harmless jokes to regard wistfully, even with a sort of tenderness?

"I am so sorry for them," she would say. She was sorry for everybody who was sick, or sad, or even naughty, as I sometimes told her! And she answered "that sickness or sadness often made naughtiness." Yet she herself was sometimes both—she was not very strong, as I slowly found out—but this never made *her* "naughty."

One day—shall I ever forget it?—a blustering March day, when we could hardly keep our footing, or succeed always in "dodging" the sudden waves that came sweeping against the pier—over it sometimes, in a shower of spray—she and I went as usual to see the boat come in. I liked to go; the wild weather never harmed me, and somehow even the sight of the ocean which divided us seemed to bridge over the distance between me and Charlie. I once said as much to my companion, and she answered that it was "natural."

She, too, enjoyed the sea on stormy days, so we stood our ground—almost the only ladies who did so—and watched the little dot of a boat come nearer across the Channel, appearing and then almost disappearing among the high waves—"like a human life," Miss Trotter said—till it got home at last.

She counteracted the sentimental remark by a series of harmless jokes, which made me laugh in spite of myself. I had put my arm round her—as I did sometimes, being a very tall girl and she such a little woman that I almost thought that she would be blown away—when I suddenly felt her start, and saw her eyes were fixed with something more than curiosity on one of the passengers.

He stood on the deck a little apart, waiting till the crowd at the gangway should melt away, and idly looking up at the white cliffs, as if it had been many a long year since he had last seen them. He was a tall gentleman, tall and thin. If I say he reminded me of Don Quixote I mean no offence to that hero—always a great favorite of mine—or to this man, who looked a man in the best sense of the word. Gaunt and gray, and rather shabbily dressed, in half-military fashion, with a decidedly military bearing, he never could have been mistaken for anything but that rather rare article—"a man and a gentleman."

Following the direction of Miss Trotter's eyes, he attracted mine too.

"Who can he be? Is he anybody you know?"

"I think so," she answered beneath her breath. "Come with me to the gangway, Decie! you will be so glad."

Her lips were quivering, but her smile, as she turned to me—I shall never forget it!—never cease to be grateful for her kind thought of me just then.

In another minute I saw her hold out her hand—"Major Gordon, I believe?"

Major Gordon! Charlie's uncle!

The tall gentleman started, and, perceiving us, lifted his hat.

"I am Major Gordon. But—pardon me; my memory often fails me."

He accepted, bowing, her offered hand; he looked down intently into her face, without the slightest sign of recognition.

"I beg your pardon—I ought to know you, and yet——"

"I am Miss Trotter, Mrs. Murray's friend. And this is Miss Decima Murray."

"Ah, yes!" A light seemed to break upon him; he turned to me and shook my hand warmly. Then Charlie must have told him. Perhaps he had even seen Charlie.

I was so delighted, that, as the children say, I "hardly knew whether I stood on my head or my heels." He had come home, this uncle from India, who was to prove a sort of protecting angel to Charlie, whom probably he had met before he started, and who had told him to come and see me. He looked as if he liked me, as if he meant to like me—the dear old gentleman! For he was an old gentleman—that is, he might be something between fifty and seventy; but after forty everybody was "old" to me then.

"I have heard of you, Miss Murray; I meant to come and see you. This chance meeting is a great pleasure to me, and also to find you with an old friend——"

He turned to Miss Trotter, who stood a little aside, and spoke to her kindly and cordially. Evidently he had no feeling about the tailor-uncle, but asked after

"all the family" with a slightly hesitating air, as if trying to remember of what it had consisted, and where they all now were.

Miss Trotter soon set him at ease. "I have no relations; they are all dead long ago. There is only me."

Major Gordon shook her hand warmly again and again, thanking her for being "so very kind" as to remember him for all these years since he had been last in England. "How many years? for really I have lost count. One forgets so many things—I can hardly believe that I am again at home. And how strange to find one face, not to say two faces"—he bowed and smiled to each of us; a most pleasant smile, that lighted up his worn face into something like youthfulness—"to meet me with such a kindly welcome."

"Luggage, sir," cried an officious porter, just taking away the gangway; and we dropped into the business of life again.

He had very little luggage—surprisingly little for a gentleman home from India; but then he was a soldier, and accustomed to rough it, as evidently he did. My Charlie would have been horrified at travelling with such a portmanteau. Major Gordon caught me looking at it.

"Old and battered, like myself," said he with a smile. "Never mind, it has seen good service. And now—it also is coming home."

A slight sigh, almost immediately repressed, and Major Gordon stood, looking around him with a half-bewildered air, and faintly putting aside, with a rather irritable gesture, the appealing porters, or inn-touters, who began to gather round him.

"Where am I going? I don't know my good man. Nowhere particular. The custom-house? yes, the

custom-house—I must follow the rest. Good day—adieu! and thank you, ladies."

But Miss Trotter came forward, with her practical, business-like air—she was the most thorough "woman of business" I ever knew.

"I am a resident here, and can easily get your luggage examined and passed. Also, my carriage is waiting at the head of the pier, and if you would return and dine with us——"

I hung upon his hand—he was my Charlie's dear old uncle!—and begged him to come. I was sure—quite sure—Miss Trotter would be glad to see him. "Do come with us," I implored; "Do come home."

"Come home!" he repeated, with a strange pathos in the words. "You are very kind," turning to Miss Trotter, "and I thank you. Yes, I will come."

And so it befell that Major Gordon's first day in England, after so many years, was spent in Miss Trotter's house, with herself and me. A very pleasant day—and to me, at least, a real felicity. How I blessed the "chance," as I thought it (not being aware till long afterward that some of his friends had known he was daily expected in England)—the happy chance which brought Charlie's uncle to Dover, and brought me to the Admiralty Pier at the very moment of his landing. Nor did he himself disguise his pleasure. An Indian officer, retired invalided upon half-pay, with no relations and no money, is not likely to have a very jubilant welcome home.

He said as much, or rather, it dropped from him unawares, while sitting peacefully at our fire-side—I had become so much at home there that I often called it "ours." But otherwise he spoke very little of himself or his affairs.

Nor, eagerly as I expected it, did he once refer to mine. He watched me. I felt he was "taking stock of me"—noticing every word I said, everything I did, with a sharp observance almost amounting to suspicion; but except in answer to a question or two from Miss Trotter—bless her for that!—he never mentioned Charlie.

I should have been angry with him, except that, as he sat warming his long brown hands at the fire—his gray mustache and thin, sallow face giving him more the air of a Don Quixote than ever—he looked such a lonely man that I felt sorry for him. After a time, however, he brightened up and turned to Miss Trotter, who sat in the shadow—her little figure half buried in the depths of her favorite arm-chair. He began talking with her of old times.

"It was so kind of you to speak to me. I cannot imagine how you recognized me, after all the years that have passed since we met—I forget how many."

"Not so very many—ten perhaps—"

"And where was it I saw you last? I ought to recollect, but my memory is so bad. I am getting quite an old man now."

"At Mrs. Murray's—just before you sailed. Also, if you remember, you came to see me at Crookfield—my father had just died."

"Ah, yes, I came once, and I ought to have come oftener—but"—a dark shadow crossed his face—"my time was much engrossed just then."

Miss Trotter said nothing, and after a minute or so he again recurred to her father.

"The dear old rector—how kind he was to me when I was a young man! Not so very young neither—I was nearly thirty, but I felt like a boy during all that furlough. How I enjoyed fishing in the rectory stream,

and making hay in the rectory meadow? It seems all like a dream now—so very long ago."

"Yes."

"But perhaps you will hardly recollect—you must have been such a mere child then, Miss Trotter—fourteen or thereabouts."

"Seventeen. I was older than I looked."

"And you have changed very little. I could almost see the face of the little girl in the hay-field."

Was it my fancy, or a sudden red glow from the firelight? but I saw the delicate pink cheek—Miss Trotter had the complexion of a girl still—change to a deep carmine. Our guest never saw it: he was gazing absently into the glowing coals—indeed, he had mechanically taken up the poker to stir them, but dropped it with a smile.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Trotter—and yet—I have certainly known you more than seven years."

She too smiled, and said gently that he need not apologize—she did not consider him as a stranger; and then she rose and made the tea, leaving him and me to sit and talk. But he did not profit by the opportunity; he still told me not a scrap of news about poor Charlie. Either he was very reticent—men are so much shyer about love-affairs than women—or else the time for him to take any interest in such things had long passed by. Very likely! Whatever he had been, he was certainly growing into an "old fogy" now. Not even a rich "old fogy," as I had somehow imagined him to be. His clothes were decidedly shabby; and when there was a talk of his going to sleep at the Lord Warden, he said it would be "too expensive," and decided with a dignified indifference that I marvelled at—so unlike Charlie!—to take up his quarters at a much inferior hotel.

"Not that I have sunk to the 'worst inn's worst room,' as Pope has it—how fond your father was of Pope, Miss Trotter!—but I am obliged to take care of my pence, else my pounds would not take care of themselves. And I am growing an old man now."

No one contradicted the fact—which indeed was only too true. As he sat thoughtfully twirling his gray mustache, and sometimes putting a hand upon his broad forehead, bald to the crown, as if to remove a certain feeling of confusion there, no one would have imagined Major Gordon anything but an old man.

And with an old man's peculiarity he again and again reverted to the days of his youth, and this pretty village of Crookfield, of which Miss Trotter's father had been rector.

"How long is it since you were there? Is it much changed?" he asked. "Everything is changing nowadays—everything and everybody; I should hardly like to see it again. I have never seen it but that once, since—let me consider—I believe not since the day your father married me. You know"—turning suddenly to Miss Trotter—"you know that my wife is dead?"

"Yes."

He stated the fact—indeed, the two facts, between which had come such a lifelong tragedy—(I found it all out afterward)—merely as facts, nothing more. With the silent dignity which makes most men—not, alas! women—cover over their domestic wounds, he wrapped his mantle round him, Cæsar-like, hiding every drop of blood, every quiver of pain. He had always done it, I heard, and he did it still.

But all was ended now. As we watched him from our wicket-gate walk down the moonlight shore—we had gone a few steps outside to show him the way to

his hotel—upright still, and soldier-like in his bearing, but so thin and withered-up and melancholy-looking, one wondered if he had ever been young. I said as much to Miss Tommy.

"A nice old gentleman, though, but rather grim. No wonder they call him Don Quixote. But how anybody could ever say that, even in his young days, he was like my Charlie——"

Miss Trotter turned, with just the shadow of sharpness in her gentle voice. "You girls are apt to make severe criticisms and rash judgments. Had you known Major Gordon in his 'young days,' as you call them, perhaps you would have thought differently. He might not have been exactly handsome, but there was no one so graceful, so courteous, such a true gentleman. Still, like Don Quixote, if you will," she added, with a little laugh, but I saw in the moonlight that her eyes were glittering with tears.

"He certainly is very like Don Quixote now," said I; "and what a mercy his Dulcinea is dead! Did you notice he never talked about her? Perhaps he loved and admired her to the last. And so they were married at your village?"

"Yes; she came from near there."

"And she was very beautiful, and he was very much in love with her? They went out to India and then they came back for a year, with the little daughter that died here, and he returned alone?"

I put these facts, which I had heard, in the form of questions, hoping to find out more, but Miss Trotter merely answered, "I believe so." She was as reticent as the Major himself. Whatever she know of his affairs she kept in as sacred silence as he did. And there was no getting out of her what she did not choose to tell.

Small as she was, simple in her bearing and feminine in her manner, no one could ever take a liberty with Miss Tommy.

In those days people did not rush about with the speed of "From London to Paris in ten hours." Major Gordon, intending to rest at Dover three days, stayed three weeks. After so much knocking about the world he seemed not sorry for even a brief repose. He and his battered portmanteau removed from the second-rate hotel which he calmly affirmed was "rather too dear for him," and took up their quarters in a lodging found for him by Miss Trotter with a widow woman, one of her numerous "friends"—she had as many friends among the poor as the rich, and she always gave them that pleasant name.

Most people are "known by their friends," who catch the reflection of themselves, more or less. Major Gordon never came to us—and he came every day—without singing the praises of his excellent landlady. Mrs. Wilson was so "good," so "clever," so "kind." He seemed surprised to find these qualities in a woman, and dwelt upon them, in the smallest trifles, with an earnest gratitude that would have been amusing, had it not been so pathetic.

And how he did enjoy his cosey, sunshiny rooms, halfway up the Castle Hill; even though on one side the sunshine rested on the white stones and green trees of an old churchyard. In front of the house was a sloping garden, where the birds were just beginning to build. There, too, he had the familiar military element to amuse him, for all the traffic of the Castle passed his door, and he would prick up his ears like an old war-horse, Mrs. Wilson said, at the tramp of a regiment or the music of a band.

Major Gordon was not exactly a reading man. His eyes were weak, he told us; he had once had slight ophthalmia in Egypt; and his wandering, soldier's life had tended to the study of men rather than of books. But he was a shrewd old fellow, as I soon saw. He had gone through the world with his eyes open, and his observations on things and people were often very acute; though with regard to himself and his own affairs he had the simplicity of a child.

In fact, as I said to Miss Trotter, Charlie's uncle amused me exceedingly—"he was such a queer combination of the serpent and the dove." I laughed with him and at him; I admired him and criticised him, after the boldly candid fashion of young people. But Miss Tommy never made any comments upon him at all.

As I said, instead of three days he stayed three weeks, before going on to London, which he seemed in no hurry to do.

"My business can stand over, and keep no one waiting; nobody expects me," he said one day, with a smile, half sad, half cynical—there was a touch of cynicism in many of his remarks, which always had the effect of making Miss Trotter silent. "All I have to do can be done at any time."

"No time like the present, as Miss Trotter would say," I answered, laughing.

"Young lady," said the Major, turning upon me with a sharpness so unwonted that it actually made me start, "if you had no future and no past, you would trouble yourself very little about the present."

Which seemed to be his way—a kind of indifferent drifting with the tide, sad to see in a man who has passed his prime, from whom youth's energy has naturally de-

parted, leaving behind neither the firm resolve of middle life nor the calm contentment of old age.

Possibly I give my impressions of Major Gordon more from what I afterward knew of him than from what I first observed, for he was not one of those people who take you by storm—it required time and opportunity to find him out. We had both. He seldom missed a day in coming to East Cliff, though never until afternoon; for Miss Trotter's mornings were always full—mine, too, by the force of example, which was ten times better than precept. But in the lengthening spring evenings, when daylight began to fade, we used to see his tall, thin figure, with that old fur coat buttoned to the throat, appearing in the distance down the Esplanade; he would join us and walk home with us, sit down by our fireside "for just ten minutes," and when he once sat down he never got up again.

One could scarcely wonder at this. The bright room, the cosey tea-table—not your careless, come-and-go, afternoon tea, which had not then been invented, but the good old-fashioned evening meal, with the hissing urn, the hot muffins, the yellow marmalade and tempting jam, and the mistress of it all sitting at the head of her table, with her placid, homelike smile. No wonder that her guest sometimes put his cup down and regarded her wistfully.

"Miss Trotter," he said one day, "you are the most comfortable-looking woman I ever knew, and the cleverest at making other people comfortable."

"Thank you," she laughed.

"And I remember you were the same as a child. How your father used to call you his 'little house-mother!' What a pity——" He stopped; perhaps he had been going to say, "What a pity you were never married," but

politeness made him alter it to "What a pity more women were not like you!"

That simple, open admiration—so outspoken and free from all reserve—it seemed sometimes rather to wound its object. She always turned the conversation, as now.

"Yes, my father had many a pleasant nickname for his favorites. Yours, I remember, was 'Bonnie Prince Charlie.'"

Major Gordon laughed heartily. "What a misnomer! The adjective should have been applied to you; for I think you were the 'bonniest' little girl I ever saw. It was a pleasure to look at you—as it is still"—with a courtly bow, so completely belonging to the stately compliments of the old school that no one could be offended at it.

And yet I fancied I saw that pained look again cross Miss Tommy's face—the sweetest "old lady's" face that ever was, as I thereupon declared. She made us both a little bow, and bade us "go on with our tea, and talk no more nonsense."

Thus we enjoyed our innocent jokes, a very happy trio; or, if not happy, at least contented. If two of us had felt inclined to keep up the "winter of our discontent," it was "made glorious summer" by the sunshiny nature of the third. Miss Tommy honestly declared that she *liked* to be happy; and no one could live with her, as I had done all these months, without becoming, in a moderate and decorous degree, happy too.

I said so to Major Gordon, one day when he and I were walking together, as we sometimes did, for many a merry mile, Miss Trotter following us in her little pony carriage; for she was not strong, and often said what a "thankfulness" it was to her that, having walked so much in her youth, she could in her old age afford the

luxury of driving. But we two were still young and active, she told us, and she watched us striding along through the pleasant lanes and sweeps of undulating country which lie inland, just beyond Dover town.

We were bound to St. Radegund's Abbey, which we wished to show Major Gordon before he left. His departure, fixed and unfixed again several times, was finally settled for to-morrow ; and, the week after, so was mine. I too was going to London, to resume my family's usual round of "the season ;" to be speculated upon by match-making mothers, criticised by ugly sisters, and flirted with by undesirable younger brothers, to my mother's great alarm. No need ! My heart was bound up in my absent Charlie.

His uncle had told me nothing about him. Our affair, if he knew it, and I could not help fancying he did know, was apparently of no importance to him—a mere specimen of the "calf-love" which I had more than once heard him contemptuously refer to in conversation. The "tender passion" was clearly not in his line. He treated me much like any other young lady—politely, paternally, but without showing any special interest in me or recognizing my possible future tie to himself. Now I, though sometimes he vexed me by the stolidity with which he ignored all my "fishing questions," having all one aim—Charlie—I could not help feeling a deep interest in him and a sense of regret at his departure, which surprised myself.

"What is there in some people that, though we are glad to see them, we never miss them ; while others, whenever they go away, they leave a large hole behind ?"

I had said this to Miss Tommy as she was tying on her bonnet for our expedition ; and I happened to catch in the glass the reflection of her face. Such a mournful

expression it had, with its wide eyes that saw nothing, and its close-set mouth, as if fixed for the endurance of an eternal want, a perpetual pain.

It haunted me all through the walk, though whenever she passed us her face was dressed in smiles—so much so that Major Gordon said:

"What a very happy woman Miss Trotter seems to be! a great deal happier perhaps, than if she had been married."

Which was one of many severe remarks on the married state which continually fell from him, inclining me to rise up and do battle with him, except that he had the advantage of me, and of Miss Trotter too, in having been married. But, as she said to me once, there are two kinds of cynics—those who do not believe at all, and those who believe so intensely that they will accept nothing short of absolute truth—absolute perfection. Was that the reason *she* had never married?

Arrived at St. Radegund's, I took out my sketch-book—Charlie had a fancy for art, and had given me once some lessons, so of course I stuck to my drawing valorously. I had talked to Charlie's uncle as long as I could, but still he was an "old fogie;" the young and old have not many points in common, and after a while find one another's society a trifle dull. Now, elderly folk do not seem to mind dulness, but can go on together, as I have known Major Gordon and Miss Trotter do, for ever so long, without exchanging a dozen words.

They did so now. After we had examined the ruins, and speculated on the departed St. Radegund, who, I believe, was a lady abbess, and this her convent; but really I felt little interest in her, a long dead and buried woman, while I was a living woman, oh! so keenly, painfully alive! I left my two respected seniors to

their mutual society, and took refuge in my own, which was much more interesting. Soon I had settled myself in a secluded corner to make my sketch, and think of Charlie.

Both these useful occupations had absorbed me for a good half-hour, when I heard voices behind me ; there was a broken wall between, and they evidently did not know I was there. Indeed, they were in such earnest talk—those two worthy friends of mine—that I should not have troubled myself about them, any more than they about me, had I not, after a minute or so, caught Charlie's name.

"Yes, he is a real good fellow, that nephew of mine! I only wish I could be a better uncle and godfather to him ; but I have little influence and no money. Besides, he is in the queen's service, and I in 'John Company's.' His only way of getting promotion is by purchase. If I had the money I once made—you know I never was extravagant, and I did hope to keep enough to be comfortable in my old age, and perhaps have a trifle for Charlie—well, it is gone, and there is little use in speaking about it."

"No." There was something strangely pathetic in these monosyllables of Miss Trotter's, which implied and concealed so much, Her soft "No" and "Yes"—I can almost hear them still!

"You are right. Let bygones be bygones. That has always been my principle and practice. The loss of the money was not my fault, only my misfortune. With my small needs I can do without it. And now about Charlie."

Was I mean? I think I was ; yet the impulse to listen was irresistible. For three weeks I had been kept on the tenter-hooks of suspense ; not a word, good, bad,

or indifferent, did his uncle say of my poor Charlie. Of course, the ideal and honorable thing just now would have been a good loud cough! But that might have perplexed them. Indeed, I had already heard a little too much, for it was easy to guess that Major Gordon's "misfortune" was his wife. I made this excuse to myself at the time for doing what I did. Well, I did it, and there's an end.

"Charlie, poor lad! Well, he may be a great fool—a young man in love usually is—but he is an honest fool. He told me everything, and made me promise to go and see his young lady as soon as I reached England. This was the cause of my inflicting myself so long on your kindness, Miss Trotter."

"I perceive."

"It was my only chance of finding out what stuff the girl was made of. Not a bad sort of girl. As you say, Charlie might have done worse; but he would have done better not to have got into the entanglement at all."

Entanglement! Charlie's devotion to me an "entanglement!" I was furious, first at Major Gordon and then at Miss Trotter. What could these two old idiots know about love—such love as mine and Charlie's?

After a pause I heard the latter say gently, "What is your objection?"

"First and foremost—she has money."

Was it my fancy, or a real tremble in her voice, as Miss Trotter answered, "Few people besides yourself would count that an objection. Why?"

"Can you ask? when Charlie has not a halfpenny! No, no; a man with proper pride would never have dreamed of such a thing."

"Is not that rather hard for Decie? When she herself is worth much more than her fortune?"

And then my dear Miss Tommy spoke up for me, warmly, kindly, generously, until I felt myself blushing to the ears, and wished with all my heart I had been half as good as she thought me.

"We will let that pass," replied Major Gordon in his most worldly tone; he was both worldly and matter-of-fact sometimes, or liked to appear so. "My dear Miss Trotter, you always believe the very best of everybody. Yet the girl is a good girl enough; but how do we know what sort of a woman she will turn out? Many a man is deceived by a pretty face; he marries it, and learns afterward to loathe it. A handsome girl—a girl with money; how can you tell that she will not grow into an arrant flirt—a *married* flirt, the worst of all—or a scolding, extravagant jade, or some of those delightful forms of the genus woman that we sometimes see in India? Never in England, of course;" and I could imagine the Major's courteous, deprecatory bow. Though I heard also his bitter laugh, which negatived it.

And after a minute I heard the sweet pleading voice: "We need not talk; it is enough, generally, to act. What can be done for these foolish young people? They are very fond of one another."

"Fond?—as a child is fond of a stick of sugar-candy. Take it away and they will soon get over it. Best that they should get over it."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Quite sure. A man who marries young is a fool; if he marries late in life he often takes the crooked stick and repents it till death. The wisest man is he who never marries at all. And so I said to my nephew Charlie."

"And he said——"

"The usual thing! Did any young man in love ever listen to anybody's advice, or feel anything but hatred to the prudent parent or friend that stood between him and his madness?"

"Have you done this?"

"Not at all. My bark is worse than my bite, I assure you. I only told him he was a very great fool, and that I could not help him in the least. Had I been a rich man now, I might have been a fool too, for I like the lad—I might have bought his promotion, and sent him home in three years, a colonel perhaps, to marry Miss Decie, supposing she is still true to him, which is not over likely. Could any girl of nineteen keep true for a twelvemonth to any man?"

Miss Trotter made no answer, and Major Gordon went on to thank her for her interest in his nephew.

"And he really is a good fellow, who will work his way and get promotion—also gray hairs. Miss Murray will by that time be the happy wife of an earl or a millionnaire. Your rich people generally marry money—carrying coals to Newcastle. I hope, by-the-bye, that Mrs. Murray will not suspect me of doing anything to forward my nephew's cause by my visit here?"

"I will take care she shall not."

"And, Miss Trotter, do not imagine I think ill of your young *protégée*, who is most fortunate in having you for her friend. She is a very pleasant person; she might make a good wife; and, if I could earn money enough to buy Charlie's promotion—— Do you think anybody would give work—paying work—to a broken-down old soldier?"

He said this with a laugh, but evidently meant it—an intention so kindly that I forgave him a good deal; forgave too the answer by which Miss Trotter negatived it.

"I think it is the young who ought to work. The old should take rest; they need it, and deserve it."

"But you—you never seem to rest? You are busy from morning till night, chiefly for other people. You are able to throw yourself out of yourself in the most marvellous way. You think of everybody; does anybody ever think of you? Nay, here am I, keeping you standing discussing Charlie's affairs and my own, when you ought to be sitting in your carriage. Where is it? Shall I go and fetch it?"

"If you please."

I heard him stride away—heard her creep forward and sit down on a stone—a broken pillar. The bent little figure, the hands tight-clasped on her lap, the head drooped down as in patient acquiescence under a long-familiar burden—I can see her still, my dear Miss Tommy!

But just then I saw nothing but myself, and my own indignation, which at last boiled over. I startled her by my sudden appearance.

"Miss Trotter, you must drive me home. I will not walk back with Major Gordon. I have heard—I don't care whether I was right or wrong—but I overheard, accidentally, every word he has been saying to you about me and Charlie. And—I hate him!"

Whereupon I burst at once into a storm of tears.

Miss Trotter rose and came beside me. I felt my hand taken, with a firm, soft clasp, which calmed me in spite of all my wrath.

"My dear, they say listeners never hear any good of themselves, but you cannot have heard much harm. And people are often mistaken without being actually wrong. We need not 'hate' them. We should rather be sorry for them."

"I am not sorry for him at all—the hard, worldly-minded, mean old fellow."

Here a little hand was laid upon my mouth.

"Not mean—he never could be mean. And you never could speak ill of Charlie's uncle. He is fond of Charlie."

I looked down in her face with its soft, pale smile—not till now had I noticed how exceedingly pale she was—and it seemed to comfort me.

"I can't imagine how it is that you understand everybody's troubles, and have a cheering word to say to everybody. It must be because you are so happy and have had such an easy life."

"Must it? Well never mind. Dry your tears, Decie—an April shower on an April day, for indeed it is no more. Look, there comes the carriage, and Major Gordon, carrying a great bunch of primroses. Does that look 'worldly-minded?' Forgive him my dear. Take no notice of anything. Do your best—and leave the rest."

I obeyed her. I received Major Gordon and his floral offering—which he presented to me with the air of a knight of the Middle Ages—without betraying any grudge against him. Nay, I even walked home with him, conversing in the most amicable manner on the beauties of spring, and the pity it was to waste May mornings and June evenings in the follies of the London season, just as if I had never "hated" him at all.

It was impossible indeed to hate him long. There was such an extraordinary sweetness about him—that mixture of sweetness and strength which in a man is so fascinating, at any age. Charlie had it in degree; but I must confess I never saw it so strongly marked in any man as in Charlie's uncle, despite his bald crown and gray hairs.

"He might almost win a woman's heart yet," I said to Miss Trotter, after he had departed that night, bidding us a rather lingering good-bye, for he was to start at eight next morning. He seemed quite uncertain when he should come back, if he came back at all. "Perhaps he may find some rich widow who would take him, oddities and all, or some benevolent and eager-to-be-married old——"

I stopped, ashamed, for I had ceased to laugh at old maids since I had known Miss Tommy. Though no one could be less like the received type of an old maid than she was, with her lovely old face, so peaceful and smiling, her contented air, and her universal and most motherly tenderness, especially over the young.

"Some 'unappropriated blessing,' which is the polite term for an unmarried woman," said she, with a gentle smile. "No, I do not think Major Gordon is likely to marry. But he might have a long and useful life yet. I trust he will have. He deserves it."

She rose and took up his gloves—such an old and shabby pair! which he had left behind on his favorite arm-chair—the Major's chair we had got to call it; it looked sad and empty now.

"We will send them after him when we know where he has gone to," she said, and folded them up and laid them carefully in a drawer.

That night she went to bed rather early—we had got into a habit of sitting "four feet on a fender" over the dying fire till midnight—and she looked very tired all next day. But she said she had to do double duty consequent on yesterday's idleness, so went about as usual, while I busied myself in preparing for my melancholy departure.

I had not thought till I came to leave her how sorry I

should be to do it—how I should miss her genial smile, her ceaseless care and thought for me. That busy life seemed still to have room for everything and everybody.

"Good-byes are sore things," I said, thinking sorrowfully of mine with Charlie; of which Miss Trotter might have been thinking too, for she answered:

"And yet it is something to have the right to grieve—to know that the grief is mutual—to feel that the parting is not indefinite. There are those who have none of these consolations, yet they have to bear the same pang. Some partings are like death itself, only without its peace."

I looked up from my packing, for she spoke with keen sympathy, even emotion.

"Yes, there must be some poor young creatures even more miserable than I and Charlie."

"I and Charlie," "Charlie and me!" I wonder she was not sick of that perpetual chorus of egotistical woe, which I, like many another foolish girl, inflicted upon my affectionate friends—at least upon this friend. She insisted that I should "keep myself to myself" with other people; especially with my family, who, I shrewdly suspected, would not stand as much as she did. I should have henceforth to conceal my sorrows, or try and rise superior to them, and make myself as happy as I could, with Charlie away; which seemed a sort of infidelity to Charlie.

When I said so, Miss Tommy smiled.

"My dear, young people in love always think it a duty to be miserable. By and by they learn a higher duty—that if you are not happy yourself you have the more need to make other people happy. The weakest, the most unchristian thing a woman can do, or a man either, is to die of a broken heart."

"Yet people have died."

"And lived—which is harder. But what nonsense we are talking! You will not die broken-hearted after parting with me, my dear," and she laughed her own merry laugh. "And for Charlie, I would advise you for the next three months at least, not to say a word about Charlie. You may think of him all the same, you know."

"Don't laugh at me."

"I am not laughing. I want you to think of him. I hope you will keep true to him; for one real love, be it ever so sad, is better than twenty 'fancies,' or a hundred 'flirtations.'"

"Thank you—thank you; you are not like Major Gordon. You believe in me; you do not think I shall ever forget Charlie."

"No."

We stood at the wicket-gate for a breath of the salt sea, just to refresh us before bedtime. The moonlight nights were over; but through the clear darkness we could trace the beautiful curve of the bay, studded with its ring of lights—the incoming tide, heard rather than seen, on the one hand, and the dim outline of white cliffs on the other. How many a night we had walked up and down, the two of us—latterly the three—and now it was all come to an end.

"You will have to take your walks alone," I said.

"Yes; I am used to it."

That phrase, with its infinite pathos! I did not notice it then, nor understand it; I was too young to have "got used" to anything. But I somehow felt my heart yearn toward the solitary woman. Any unmarried woman must be solitary, I thought. I put my arms round her and kissed her, not as a mere salutation, but

with the warm kisses of youth, as I used to kiss Charlie (no! let me correct myself, as Charlie used to kiss me). She kissed me back again, with, to my surprise, a great sob; and then and there in the silent starlight, to my still greater surprise, she—like the people in the Bible —"fell on my neck and wept." My dear Miss Tommy!

PART II.

CHARLIE GORDON did come back at the three years' end; and, despite his uncle's prophecy, he did find me true, and not married either to an earl or a millionnaire. I will not say that I had not been asked; but that is neither here nor there, and, as Miss Trotter once observed, the less a woman says about her rejected lovers the better.

She—my dear Miss Tommy—happened to be sitting with me when Charlie suddenly appeared.

It was the day after my twenty-first birthday, which, though lively enough, I cannot say was very happy. But I tried hard to make it so; for I had by this time learned my lesson—the lesson first taught me by her dear old self in her pretty house at Dover, during the peaceful three months when she "took me in"—me, almost a "stranger"—and returned me back to my parents healed in body and mind. At least I was so much better that I endured the ensuing three years without making myself unendurable to my family, as is the way with so many young people who have been "crossed in love." Much pity I have for them, poor things!—the tender pity that Miss Tommy had for me; but my pity never blinds me, as it never blinded her, to the truth of the matter, namely, that to waste one's life, with all its duties, all its blessings—and few lives are void of the latter, none of the former—to sacrifice it on the shrine of any one human being, is, as some statesman said of a great political error, "worse than a crime—a blunder."

And had I for those three years made myself and my family utterly miserable on Charlie's account, I should certainly have committed a great blunder ; for I should have taught them to despise me and hate him—hate my dear Charlie, the best, nicest, pleasantest—but I will not forestall things.

On my birthday—which was rather an important date, since on coming of age I inherited some money from an old great-aunt—I had all my own people about me : my married brothers and their families, my two elder sisters, both engaged and making "excellent matches"—to my mother's great delight. For me, I would not have married either of my brothers-in-law elect for the world! But I was very civil to them, and took with composure the jokes about my "unattached" condition, without a single creature to pay me attention either in the house or at the birthday ball. Instead, I occupied myself with paying attention to my dear Miss Tommy, who, though I had not been allowed to visit her again, was always considered in the family as my particular friend, and invited to our house whenever I desired it.

Not since that pleasant fortnight which I spent with him had I again seen Major Gordon. My family met him once in society, and—by all accounts—gave him so unmistakably the "cold shoulder" that I scarcely wondered he had left unfulfilled his promise of coming to see me when he was "settled" in London. But possibly he never had settled anywhere ; for I had heard nothing of him until quite lately, when, in answer to my questions, Miss Trotter said that in an accidental letter which she had received from him he "inquired kindly" after me.

This was all. She evidently wished to say as little as possible about the Gordons—uncle and nephew—which

did not contribute to the happiness of my birthday. But, I reflected, no doubt she felt bound in honor to tell me nothing about Charlie, and perhaps after all she had very little to tell. For when I communicated to her the only news which had reached me of Major Gordon—how some mutual friend had met him in the city looking very shabby, worn, and old—she seemed both surprised and pained.

But to return to me and Charlie. By-the-bye, it was a creditable novelty in me to "return" to Charlie, instead of making him, as aforetime, the one sole subject of my conversation. He appeared, as I have said, the very day after my birthday. We were sitting among the *débris* of the ball, in the dulness of tired-out folk, when the footman suddenly announced "Colonel Gordon."

"It must be a mistake—and mamma and the girls are out," I said to Miss Trotter; but she only smiled.

"It's you, miss, that the young gentleman asks for," said our old John, with a grin—well he knew Charlie in the old days! "And he told me to say *Colonel* Gordon."

So in he walked, as composedly as if he had been the fairy prince come to demand the hand of the beautiful princess, which he did within an hour or two, of her astounded parents!

There was no reason why he should not. He was no longer Mr., but Colonel, Gordon. A lucky battle (alas! that we should call it so) had promoted him—had enabled him to come home in time to keep his tryst with me, and to "come forward," as the phrase goes, with dignity and independence, to ask me of my father.

We sat together in the little boudoir, hand-in-hand, like children; sat and cried for joy—kissing one another between whiles, also like children; for there was no one near except Miss Trotter, knitting energetically in the

big drawing-room. I introduced Charlie to her, saying she was a friend of his uncle ; but he did not seem to have heard of her or to think much about her. In truth, poor dear fellow ! at that moment he thought of nothing but me ; and declared he had thought of nothing but me all the time he had been parted from me. Which I hope was true. At any rate, I saw no reason to doubt it.

" A colonel's pay is not a fortune, my Decie, but it is quite equal to what you have, and so my pride is satisfied—my uncle's too. He met me when I reached London yesterday. We had a long talk, and though he did not exactly advise me to come here to-day, he did not object to it. He said he liked you very much, and that if I must be so foolish as to marry, perhaps I had better marry you ; and so——"

Here Charlie ended his sentence in another but equally satisfactory way. Oh, dear me ! how foolish we are when we are young, and yet how sweet is the folly !

And then he told me confidentially a remarkable fact —which there was no need to make a matter of public talk—that when he came home he found lying at the banker's a large sum of money, which, added to his colonel's pay, would give an income sufficient to enable us to marry at once. It had been paid into the bank anonymously—by whom, he had not the remotest idea.

This latter fact was rather " uncomfortable," he owned, and I agreed with him ; still it did not strike me as wonderful that anybody should do anything for Charlie ; and among his numerous friends probably there was one who had a fancy for secret benevolence.

I thought at first it was my uncle, but found the dear old fellow knew nothing at all about the matter, of which I was very glad, for though he declares he is not

poor, that no gentleman is poor who knows the extent of his income and lives within it, still he must have great trouble to make ends meet. And he ought to have more comforts than he has, an old man like him—better clothes, better food, and perhaps some one to do his writing and reading for him: his sight is not good, though from long habit he manages extremely well. He is at once very independent and very helpless—poor Uncle Gordon!"

Here Miss Trotter, who had sat in the background absorbed in her knitting, looked up. (I had told Charlie he need not mind her; she knew all about us, and would play propriety in the most harmless way till my mother came home.)

"Has Major Gordon changed his address? Will you give it to me? I am an old friend of his."

Charlie bowed. He admired pretty women of all ages; and I could see he was quite taken by the sweet-looking little old lady.

"Who in the world is she? Trotter? Not Trotters the army-tailors?"

I stopped his whispers with the severest of frowns, made him write down the address of his uncle's new lodgings—it was in a very shabby and dreary London street—and gave it to Miss Tommy. Shortly afterward she made some excuse and left us together, which was, we both agreed, the very kindest thing she could do.

So it was all soon arranged, for Charlie was one who never allowed any grass to grow under his feet. He was determined, and so was I. We had both an independent income, small, but sufficient; and we were young and strong enough to "rough it" a little if necessary. Though it scarcely would be necessary, as, to my mother's great relief, the regiment was coming home,

so that Charlie would have, for the present at least, no more fighting, nor would my parents lose their youngest darling.

I was their darling, I felt; and they had meant me no harm, nor done it either, by insisting on the temporary separation between my lover and me. It had only made us the worthier, and, if possible, the dearer to one another. True love is all the truer for being tried.

When, next day, I received the congratulations of our mutual families—though his consisted only of his uncle, for his only living relative, a married sister, lived in the far north of Scotland—I think my Charlie's *fiancée* was the happiest girl in the world. Far happier than if I had at once got what I wanted, and oh! a thousand times happier than if I had withstood or disobeyed my parents, sulked with my brothers and sisters, and made myself generally disagreeable at home—the dear familiar home which would be mine now for so very short a time. Another home might be fuller, wider, brighter; but there is something in the innocent girl-life, free from cares and responsibilities, safe hidden in the warm nest, and cherished under the soft, motherly wing—something which a girl never gets again in all her days, and never thoroughly understands or appreciates till it is hers no more forever.

Yet, as I said to Miss Tommy, for once in my life quoting poetry,

> "Love is sweet,
> Given or returned—"

to which she only answered, "Yes"—her usual gentle "Yes." But she kissed me fondly. I am sure she was glad in her inmost heart to see me so happy.

And, looking back through many years, through "all

the chances and changes of mortal life," as the prayer-book has it, I can remember vividly that day, and feel that it was good to be happy. I can see myself sitting in my usual place at the family dinner-table, beside my father, but with Charlie on my other side, an accepted lover, and both of us, we flattered ourselves, sustaining our new position with dignity and grace. Still we were both a little nervous—I am sure I was—and it was quite a relief that there were no strangers present, except two who could hardly be called such—Miss Trotter and Major Gordon.

They happened to sit together at the other end of the table, for my mother had, of course, been taken in to dinner by Charlie's uncle, and my father—he was a little *distrait*, poor man, and no wonder!—had forgotten Miss Tommy. She would have had to walk in alone, had not Major Gordon, ever courteous, turned and given her his other arm.

So the two old acquaintances were placed side by side, which they seemed to enjoy, for they talked a good deal. And, as I noticed to Charlie (it was such a comfort to have Charlie to tell everything to once more!), his uncle grew less solemn and Don Quixotish—as who would not under the sunshiny influence of my dear Miss Tommy? (N.B. I never called her that to her face, but she knew we often did so behind her back; nor do I think she disliked it—she once told me that her father's pet name for her was always "Tommy.")

As I sat in my usual place, radiant in my new happiness, with all my dear ones about me, and especially the dearest of all, more than once I caught Miss Trotter's glance wandering toward me with a wistful tenderness almost amounting to sadness, and I wondered, with a sudden flash of intuition, born of my deep bliss, what

her youth had been, whether she had ever known, even for a brief moment, the felicity which, thoughtless as I was in these early days, I thought of with a sigh of content, saying with old King David, "My cup runneth over."

"I am glad to see Major Gordon here," whispered I to Charlie. "He looks a good deal older since I saw him first. I wonder what he was like as a young man?"

"They say he was like me." (To which I responded indignantly, "Oh no!") "But he would not be an ill-looking fellow, poor Uncle Gordon, if only he would spruce himself up a bit, as he has done to-day, for the credit of the family. He is not vain, but he is most awfully proud. Would you believe it, he is vexing his very life out because he cannot discover the anonymous friend to whom I owe that money, and he cannot bear being indebted to any human being. I think he is more angry than grateful. Now, I am very grateful."

And so was I, without perplexing myself about the matter, which, however, Major Gordon did not refer to at all; but whenever he fell into fits of silence or abstraction, as was not seldom, Charlie whispered, "He is worrying himself about the money, poor old dear!"

The "old dear," however, was very benignant to me, informing Charlie that "he had always liked me." Though a little stately and formal, not at all like the "gay Gordons" of the ballad, which I took care to quote to Charlie—

> "He turned about lightlie, as the Gordons does a',
> I thank you, Leddy Jean, my love's promised ava"—

still, taking him altogether, I confessed, and after he had left my mother confessed also, that Major Gordon was not an uncle to be ashamed of.

It sounded odd to call him major and his nephew colonel; but he did not seem to mind it, they being in different services. Besides, as I heard him say to Miss Trotter, what did it matter? "his day was done." A sad remark, to which she made no answer; but as he turned away, I saw her eyes follow him with a long, wistful look—which opened mine.

I was only one-and-twenty, and she—well! I had never heard exactly how old she was; but there are some people and some things which never grow old. From that minute there dawned upon me an idea, which I had the good sense and delicacy to keep entirely to myself, but which furnished me with a clue to many mysteries—even to that grand mystery of Charlie's money. And so, perhaps, I was the only person not surprised when, two days after, as we ladies were all sitting in the morning-room, there came a message that Major Gordon was below, and "wished to speak to Miss Trotter for five minutes on business."

"Do not be frightened, Decie; I know what it is," said she, taking my hand—hers was cold and nervously trembling; but she sat still and said no more.

Major Gordon walked into the room, looking more than ever "as if he had swallowed a poker," my sisters said. He exchanged a few civilities with my mother, and then, as she was leaving the room, stopped her.

"Do not go, Mrs. Murray; I have no secrets with Miss Trotter. The 'business' I wished to speak to her about is public enough—only too public. I should prefer you all hearing the question I have the pleasure, or pain, of putting to her, and which I trust she will answer candidly."

Miss Tommy looked up full in his face. It was a look quite different from that she bestowed on any of us. In

it was something at once sad, earnest, yet restful—something of a child's look, diffident and hesitating, but full of trust, reminding me of what she had once said of him, that if he had one quality more than another, it was reliableness.

"I will speak at once and resolve my doubts," he said, crossing over to her. "Miss Trotter, the unknown friend who placed that large sum to my nephew's credit at his banker's was, I have reason to believe, yourself. Am I right?"

She grew crimson all over, then paled again, and said gently, almost deprecatingly: "Yes, it was I."

"And why did you do it?"

"Ah, Major Gordon!" I cried, reproachfully, and ran to embrace my dear Miss Tommy in a burst of gratitude, but she softly put me aside.

"Why should I not do it? I have no one to spend my money upon, or leave it to—neither husband, child, nor near relation. I chose to do this, and I think I was justified in doing it."

She spoke with a mingled dignity and pathos which could not fail to strike anybody. It seemed to strike Major Gordon, and remind him that in his pride he had a little failed of courtesy: gratitude, I suppose, could not have been expected from him.

"Forgive me. I acknowledge your generosity; but there are two sides to the subject, ours and yours. It is hard enough for us, poor as we are—my nephew and I—to be connected with a wealthy family by marriage; but it is harder still, it is almost humiliating, to be indebted to——"

"I beg your pardon," interrupted Miss Trotter; and her voice had a quiver of keen pain. "*You* are not indebted to me, Major Gordon. What I did I did for the

sake of this little girl here, and for a young man who, by what I have learned—and I took some pains to find out all about him—deserves every good thing that Fortune can bestow. For me, I am merely a tool in the hands of Fortune, or Providence, to make two people happy. There is not so much of happiness in this world that I or any one need regret the deed."

The words were a little sad, but the smile was so sunny that even Major Gordon must have been a stone to resist it. He extended his hand, and clasped hers warmly.

"You are a good woman, an exceedingly good woman; and my nephew is fortunate in having your esteem—your—patronage, shall I say? No, your kind offices. I hope he will be grateful to you—I think he will."

"He ought to be!" cried my mother, warmly. She had no pangs of wounded pride, and her practical mind at once leaped to the obvious conclusion that so affectionate and wealthy a friend—an old maid, too—implied a very comfortable future for Charley and me. "But, my dear Miss Trotter, how well you kept the secret, and what a romantic idea to take into your head!"

"Not at all!" laughing in her old, pleasant way. "May not a woman do as she likes with her own? an unmarried woman especially. That is the advantage we have over you British matrons; there is no one to argue with us, no one to contradict us. Besides"—here she took a graver tone, and (I thought) turned more toward Major Gordon as she spoke—"I am rich now, but I was poor once, very poor. It teaches me to understand poverty. I mean"—and now she addressed him directly—"that you must disabuse your nephew's mind of any idea of obligation to me. I am merely paying back in my old age the debts of my youth. Do

not speak of the matter again. Forget it. Will you promise me this?"

She laid her hand on his coat sleeve—a rather shabby sleeve. Now, in full daylight, any eye—certainly a woman's—might have detected sad evidences that he had no woman to take care of him: frayed wristbands, holes in gloves, buttons missing from shirt-fronts, etc. Poor Major Gordon!

"I do promise!" he said, with much feeling; and, taking up the little hand, he kissed it in knightly fashion before us all—an action so sudden, so unlike what one would have expected of him that I did not wonder to see her start. But the expression of her dear old face was less of pleasure than pain.

Major Gordon soon left, saying, in his usual formal manner, "that he would now go in search of his nephew, explain to him this discovery, and send him to offer his own acknowledgments to his benevolent friend," indicating Miss Trotter by a stately bow, which forced me to clasp her round the neck in a fervor of enthusiasm.

"I sha'n't call you my 'benevolent friend,'" exclaimed I, half crying, half laughing. "I love you; that is all."

"And that is enough," she answered, stroking my hair in a fond way she had. Shortly afterward she went to her own room, whence she did not emerge for some hours.

Next day she bade us adieu, and departed from our large, merry household to her own solitary home.

My mother declared she could not possibly stand three weddings at once, and that Charlie and I must wait a little, which I was not sorry to do. I liked to prolong the sweetness of the courtship time; indeed, as

I confided to Miss Tommy, I would not have minded ever so long an engagement now that I really belonged to Charlie, and could be a comfort to him in all things, as he to me. And she answered that I was right. "True love was always true, whether or not it ever ended in marriage"—a sentiment in which Charlie did not wholly agree with her.

But he did agree with her, and so did I, in protesting against a grand wedding like my sisters', with three clergymen to tie the knot, and twelve bridesmaids to "assist" at the performance, which was a real "performance," and went off admirably. But I would have preferred being married in a cotton gown, with the pew-opener for my bridesmaid.

When I said this, however, Miss Tommy laughed, and declared I was going a step too far; that there were certain duties we owed to society; and, for her part, she thought it might be a pleasant thing to be married with all one's family about one.

"A blessing we solitary ones perhaps appreciate more than you," she added; and then we fell into a discussion upon family ties, *à propos* of Scotch clannishness, and of Major Gordon, in whom it was very strong. I was sure he liked Charlie, not merely for himself, dear fellow! good as he was, but because he belonged to "the family."

"And, as he once argued with me—we are very good friends now, you know—he cannot understand why you should like Charlie so much, seeing he does *not* belong to you—is not connected with you by any tie of blood. Nor am I, for that matter; yet you like me a little, don't you?"

She pressed my hand tenderly, and then said: "Yes, you are right. The tie of blood—that is all Major

Gordon cares for. Some have this feeling very strong —so strong that it blunts all sense of other ties. I have known parents, most devoted to their own children, who had no tenderness, no justice even, for other people's children; and brothers and sisters who thought whatever they did was right, and what outsiders did infallibly wrong. But perhaps I judge harshly, Decie, my dear, and from my own point of view. What would become of me if I had no heart except for my own kith and kin, of whom I have none in the wide world?"

It was not often that she spoke thus; seldom, indeed, of herself at all. She once said, laughing, "that she did not find it an interesting subject." But to-day, in the pleasure of having me with her, and on this visit—the last I should pay her before I was married—our hearts seemed to open out toward one another.

We were sitting on the Castle Hill, near the top of the steps, and looking down on Dover town and bay, which lay so still and bright, with the autumn sunset reflected in it. Miss Trotter still came, every winter, to her little house at Dover. She liked it better, she owned, than her grand mansion in the country; and so did I. We agreed that my farewell visit as Decie Murray should be to Dover. Accordingly, we fell into our old ways, and walks too. But I noticed she could not walk quite so far; she had often to stop and rest, as now. And when Charlie came down, she let us go off on our rambles by ourselves, and Major Gordon by himself. For he, too, appeared once or twice, and took up his quarters with his old landlady, who thought him "the nicest old gentleman that ever was."

Scarcely an "old" gentleman, unless one saw his face. He was so thin—slim, one might say—and upright that walking behind him and Charlie, you could hardly say

which was the uncle and which the nephew. How often we watched them both, Miss Tommy and I, standing by the window of her little drawing-room—watched them walk away together, like father and son, we looking after them—was it like mother and daughter? or aunt and niece? or simply friends—chosen friends?

People may talk as they will of the "ties of blood," but the ties of friendship, of voluntary election, firm and well founded, are fully as close and as strong—comparable to nothing, I think, except the tie of marriage; that is, the real marriage of heart and soul, which I was now beginning to understand.

"I believe," said I one day to Miss Tommy when I was standing by her side, watching those two, who had just left us, and were coming back to dinner—"I believe, if anything happened that I did not marry Charlie, I should break my heart."

"No, you would not," she answered gently, but without hesitation. "Being a good woman, you would live and bear it. But whether he lived or died, if he did nothing to make him unworthy of love, you would feel like his wife to the end of your days."

I looked at her, just on the point of saying "that this was true; only, how could she possibly understand?" and then I changed my mind and said nothing.

I cannot say I altogether liked Major Gordon's settling himself at Dover, and so persistently coming here with his nephew, like the old song—

> "You'll in your girls again be courted,
> And I'll go wooing with my boys,"

which the boys might not wholly approve of. Charlie did not, but I calmed him down. And, for certain reasons of my own, I forgave the Major, and gave him no

hint of being unwelcome. He really was not so very much in the way after all. Accustomed to long solitude, he needed very little to amuse him; and if he had done so, Miss Trotter was fully equal to the occasion. Though not exactly clever, she had the quick sympathy which is almost better than cleverness. She was always inventing some little pleasure, outside, for him and for us; and inside the house her constant cheerfulness, her unfailing sweet temper, and, above all, her bright sense of fun, made an atmosphere that would have sunned into pleasantness the grimmest old curmudgeon alive.

But Uncle Gordon was no curmudgeon, nor grim, though I sometimes accused him of being so. By degrees he seemed to become accustomed to our peaceful life, took an interest in all Miss Trotter's work, and in our play, as he called our harmless love-making, which was so soon to merge in the busy duties of life; he warned us once that we were "like a couple of lambs sporting on the edge of a precipice." However, his bitter sayings grew fewer and fewer: he seemed to accept the fact that Charlie and I were happy, and to condescend to be happy himself after his fashion. He owned that he "really enjoyed" our quiet evenings, all four together, to which I stoically submitted and compelled Charlie to submit; not shutting ourselves up in a separate nook, as most lovers do. For, as I told the dear fellow, when he got impatient and cross, we should soon have our evenings all to ourselves, and have to sit "four feet on a fender" all our lives long.

When I thought of this future—how sweet it was, how dear and familiar Charlie had grown to me, how impossible it would now be to carry on life without him—more and more it was borne in upon me what those suffer who have to live their whole life without the one

human being who is their other self, the entire satisfaction and completion of their existence. And I felt such pity—the deep pity that only happy folks can feel—for those who had been, for any cause, what is termed "disappointed in love."

Major Gordon might never have been in love at all, by the little sympathy he showed for Charlie and me. Instead of going and talking with Miss Trotter, which he could so easily have done, he would persist in keeping up desultory general conversation, which sometimes drifted back into old times, familiar to our respected seniors, but a little dull for us. They belonged to the old world—we to the new; and, fond as we were of them, there seemed a gulf between them and us. In spite of our heroic self-sacrifice, we found our evenings rather dreary, and were glad to propose a game at whist, or a book to read. Charlie read aloud remarkably well, and therefore was very good-natured in doing it.

But it was difficult to find anything he considered worth reading in the rather limited library of Miss Trotter, who, I must confess, was not a literary lady. Her books had chiefly belonged to her father. I discovered among them, to my surprise, some which Major Gordon must have given her when she was quite a girl. But neither he nor she was a book-lover now. His life had been too completely that of a wandering soldier, and hers was absorbed in the responsibilities of her large fortune and still larger heart. Still they both liked to hear "a pretty story," or a "little bit of poetry"—something which belonged to their young days—something they could understand. And one evening, when we were at our wits' end, Charlie and I, to find something "old-fashioned" enough for our dear but rather difficult friends, we lighted upon an odd volume of

Crabbe, which, no doubt, in the days of the departed Reverend John Trotter had been considered "delightful" poetry.

Charlie opened it by merest chance at a poem called "Procrastination," which probably this generation has never heard of, and yet it is very touching as well as clever in its way. It is the story of two lovers, affianced early in life.

> "The prudent Dinah was the maid beloved,
> And the kind Rupert was the youth approved."

Fortune is against them, however, and Dinah's "prudence," together with the advice of the wealthy aunt with whom she lives, causes the marriage to be put off and off. Rupert goes abroad to earn money; the aunt dies and leaves Dinah her heiress, but Rupert, still poor, is not summoned back. The letters between them grow fewer and colder. Prosperity hardens the elderly maiden's heart. She spends month after month

> "In quiet comfort and in rich content.
> Miseries there were, and woes the world around,
> But these had not her pleasant dwelling found.
> She knew that mothers grieved and widows wept,
> And she was sorry—said her prayers—and—slept."

At last there appears before her

> "A huge, tall sailor with his tawny cheek
> And pitted face."

It is Rupert, poor as ever, but loving and faithful—too faithful even to dread infidelity. The lady calls him, "friend," suggests that they are both frail and old, too old to think of love or marriage. With a mixture of

religious sentiment and worldliness, she gives him what is elegantly termed "the sack."

> "She ceased. With steady glance, as if to see
> The very root of this hypocrisy,
> He her small fingers moulded in his hard
> And bronzed broad hand; then told her his regard,
> His best respect, were gone: but love had still
> Hold in his heart, and governed yet the will,
> Or he would curse her. Saying this, he threw
> The hand in scorn away, and bade adieu.
> Proud and indignant, suffering, sick and poor,
> He grieved unseen, and spoke of love no more."

Sinking lower in fortune, he "shares a parish gift" in this his native place. There sometimes

> "At prayers he sees
> The pious Dinah dropped upon her knees;
> Thence, as she walks the street with stately air,
> As chance directs, oft meet the parted pair.
> When he with thick-set coat of badge-man's blue
> Moves near her shaded silk of changeful hue—
> When his frank air and his unstudied pace
> Are seen with her soft manner, air, and grace,
> And his plain artless look with her sharp meaning face,
> It might some wonder in a stranger move
> How these together could have talked of love."

At this point of his reading Charlie paused; he had read very well, growing interested in the story in spite of himself. So was I too. The "pious Dinah," how I hated her! We sat in a circle round the fire; well I remember the picture!—Miss Trotter in her little chair, knitting—she said she was obliged to knit to keep herself awake; yet she did not seem asleep now, though the knitting had dropped. Her wide-open eyes were fixed with a sad, yearning, unspeakably tender gaze on

the arm-chair opposite, where, in comfortable shadow —she always arranged the light so that his eyes should not be troubled by it—sat Major Gordon.

He was not sleeping either, but listening intently ; he always listened to a story with the earnest simplicity of a child.

"Shall I finish it, uncle, or are you tired ?"

"Not tired—no ! But go on—go on," he answered irritably. "Let us see how it ends."

There was very little more. Only a picture—I wonder no artist has ever painted it—of one of those chance meetings, when Rupert, sitting on a roadside seat, watches "the lady" giving orders to a tradesman, and moralizes upon how he should have treated her had their positions been reversed—

> "Ah, yes ! I feel that I had faithful proved,
> And should have soothed and raised her, blessed and loved."

And then—

> "Dinah moves on—she had observed before
> The pensive Rupert at a humble door ;
> Some thoughts of pity raised by his distress,
> Some feeling touch of ancient tenderness,
> Religion, duty, urged the maid to speak
> In terms of kindness to a man so weak.
> But pride forbade, and to return would prove
> She felt the shame of his neglected love—
> Nor wrapped in silence could she pass, afraid
> Each eye would see her and each heart upbraid.
> One way remained—the way the Levite took
> Who without mercy could on misery look
> (A way perceived by craft, approved by pride).
> She crossed, and passed him on the other side."

"The"—I am afraid it was really that strong expletive—"the devil she did !" exclaimed Major Gordon,

starting up in his chair, and then laughing at himself in a sort of shamefaced way at his great excitement over "a mere bit of poetry."

"Not poetry at all," protested Charlie, with lofty disdain. "A piece of common human nature, nothing more."

"Yes, of course it is only human nature," said his uncle, calming down. "And it served the fellow right. He was a fool to trust a woman. And any man—any poor man—who marries a rich woman is worse than a fool, a knave."

To do Major Gordon justice, I believe that, in his simplicity of nature, his entire freedom from egotism or self-consciousness, he had no idea of the drift of what he was saying. I should have given him a gentle hint that his remark was, if not untrue, at least uncivil, but I caught sight of Miss Trotter's face and held my tongue.

What a sad, strange thing it is, the way the best of people often wound others quite unintentionally! How often I have seen hands that would not willingly have hurt a fly, stab some tender heart to the very core, and pass on, never even noticing the blow, or guessing that they had wounded another, perhaps to death.

Miss Trotter rose from her little chair. As she did so, her rustling gown—she always dressed richly and becomingly—reminded me of the "shaded silk of changeful hue." But there the parallel ended.

"Decie," she said, leaning on me as she passed, for she moved feebly and unsteadily, "your Charlie reads well; I like to hear him. He has been very kind. And now, if Major Gordon approves, we will go to our game at whist."

Her smile, as she turned toward him, was somewhat

fixed in its sweetness, and there was a metallic evenness in her tone not customary with her. Then, rearranging the light so as not to incommode Uncle Gordon, whose eyes always troubled him more or less, she took her place at the card-table and played for an hour.

When our guests left she sat talking with me for a little while. I think it was about the color of my drawing-room furniture, and whether I should have chintz or damask. But as we parted on the top of the stairs, the cheek I kissed and the hands I held were as cold as stone.

Lying awake that night I thought a good deal, and before morning I made up my mind, perhaps in grievous error—I was still a girl, with a full and happy heart, which saw only one perfect happiness—love—in existence—but I meant well. I repeat—though I think of it now with an anguish of remorse, perhaps wholly unneeded—that I meant well.

The next day was one of those lovely autumn mornings that we often have at Dover—bright, mild, and so clear that the windows in Calais town were plainly visible, glittering in the sunshine across a placid sea. I had a curious fancy about Dover and Calais, places so like and so unlike, so near and yet so apart. They reminded me of two people sitting looking at one another over an easily-crossed barrier—two who have been friends all their lives, and never anything more. "Friends—lovers that might have been."

I made the remark—perhaps a very stupid remark—this day, and at luncheon, that everybody might hear. But nobody did hear apparently, except Charlie, who laughed at me for quoting poetry, and declared that Dover and Calais were not friends, but bitter enemies, and then retold the old tale of Queen Philippa and the

burghers coming with ropes round their necks, till, if he had not been such a dear innocent donkey, I could have boxed his ears.

It was such a remarkably clear day that Miss Trotter proposed a walk to the Castle. Charlie had never seen the view from the top of the Keep, and Major Gordon was never weary of going round the fortifications, explaining military tactics, and "fighting his battles o'er again," as is so pleasant to old soldiers. Sometimes, in the midst of it, he would sigh and declare "his day was done," at which we only laughed at him, for, though so excessively thin, he was a hale man yet, and had grown much stronger since his return to England. But he was just at the time of life when many people, feeling the approach of old age, dread it and resist it, instead of accepting it with its good as well as its ill. He was continually trying to do too much, and then calling himself "a broken-down man, fit for nothing in this world."

As he did this day, when, having already walked to St. Radegund's and back, he persisted in climbing the Castle, and explaining to us every inch of the forts and fortifications. At last, fairly tired out, he sat down on the turf behind the Roman Pharos, now an adjunct to the Castle church, and prepared for a quiet smoke, the one only luxury which he allowed himself.

I can see him at this minute—his sallow, bearded face, his long, thin, brown hands; he never wore gloves now, saying they were "too expensive," and, indeed, all his clothes were a little "seedy" in character. But his figure was so upright, his carriage so graceful, that if he had been clothed in a sack Major Gordon would have looked like a gentleman.

I sat down beside him, owning I was tired, and send-

ing Charlie off to the Keep in company with Miss Trotter, who volunteered to accompany him.

"How young and active she is still!" said the Major following them with his eyes. "She walks as fast as Charlie himself."

"Yes; she has spirit enough to do anything she has set her mind to do. She is a dear soul, and so sweet-looking still. I think I never saw such a pretty old lady."

"Scarcely an old lady yet; she must be ten or twelve years younger than I, and much younger in character and feelings. But she was always light-hearted."

"Was she?"

"And is so still. What a peaceful face it is! What an even, happy life she must have had!"

I said nothing. This chance turn which the conversation had taken was gradually bringing about—providentially, was it?—that to which I had made up my mind.

"You women are incomprehensible creatures, Decie," continued Major Gordon, with a long puff at his pipe, "else I should have thought it a curious circumstance that Miss Trotter, with all her attractions, has remained unmarried."

I answered that I did not find it curious at all. Some of the very best and most charming women never did marry, not because nobody asked them, but because they were asked by nobody they cared to accept. For my part, I said, I would have been an old maid and gloried in it—but for Charlie!

Charlie's uncle laughed heartily, regarding me with that amused paternal air which sometimes pleased, sometimes vexed me. Now, when I was so desperately in earnest, it altogether vexed me.

"You men are often as blind as bats," I cried. "My dear Miss Tommy is worth a hundred of you. Is it possible, Major Gordon, that it has never occurred to you why she never married?"

"No." And he turned upon me a countenance of most simple-minded astonishment—blank astonishment, nothing more.

"And does it not occur to you now that the wisest and best thing you could do, for both your sakes, would be to—to make her Mrs. Gordon?"

For a minute he seemed perfectly paralyzed—but with surprise, mere surprise—then he seemed dimly to understand. His sallow face grew scarlet; it was strange to see an old man blush like a girl. He drew himself up with a haughty dignity that I had never seen before, even in him.

"You are utterly and entirely mistaken. What you say is worse than a mistake—an insult to her and to me."

I was so confounded that I had not a word to say. My only answer was a burst of tears,—futile childish tears.

Major Gordon was one of those men who, in their worst anger, are mollified at once by seeing a woman weep.

"Don't, my dear girl, pray don't," he muttered, hastily! "I forgive you. I know you meant no harm; only you must never mention this—this folly, not even to Charlie. On no account whatever to Charlie," added he, earnestly. "It is a pure invention of your silly little brain, which must never be repeated to any human being."

He rose, letting his pipe drop as he did so; it was broken to bits, and it was a very favorite pipe too; but he never stopped to pick it up; he just rose and walked

away. I saw him through my burning tears marching up and down, with his head bent and his hands clasped behind him, but he made no effort to come back to me again.

Nor did I attempt to go to him. I could have bit my tongue off, knocked my head against the wall, in my anguish and vexation of spirit. And yet, as he truly said, I had meant no harm. I had only tried in my rash and silly way to play Providence—to put things right, which often go so cruelly wrong in this world—and I had failed.

But perhaps I had been mistaken after all? In him I certainly had. There was evidently not an atom of tenderness or emotion in him. To see him walking to and fro there, as stiff as a bronze statue, and then go forward to meet Charlie and Miss Trotter as if nothing had happened; oh! it was aggravating beyond all words!

Maybe it was to punish me, I thought, or to prevent my betraying anything to Charlie, that he put his arm through his nephew's and they walked ahead together to East Cliff; much to the annoyance of my poor boy, who naturally wanted to walk with me. For Miss Trotter—my dear Miss Tommy!—she accepted the arrangement, as she usually did any fancy of Major Gordon's, and followed with me, talking in her usual sweet way—contented always in others' contentment. For me there was nothing left but to practise the self-control which she had taught me; I kept my misery to myself, and, either from pride or pain, I think I was more than usually cheerful all that day.

It had struck me as not impossible that Major Gordon might not appear in the evening as usual; indeed, I should have thought better of him had he stopped away.

But he did not. He came in rather late, and when Charlie—whose quarters were at the Lord Warden—was just beginning to wonder what had become of his uncle; but he did come, and sat in his arm-chair, and played his game at whist in the old way. If once or twice he seemed absent or even a little sad, this was so much his habit that we none of us noticed it—at least, we never said we did; but he said "Good-night" to us with his usual gentle courtesy—not a word more than "Good-night."

Next morning, when we were sitting at breakfast, there came a note to Miss Trotter. She read it, then walked to the window and read it again. Lastly, she gave it to me to read—

"My dear Miss Trotter,—Will you say to my nephew that unexpected business demands my presence in London to-day for some time? I have accordingly given up my rooms—offering good Mrs. Wilson a week's rent instead of the proper notice. She has refused it. Therefore I am obliged to trouble you with the sum enclosed, begging you to make it useful to her in some way.

"To yourself I can only offer my excuses for not making any formal adieu, and thank you from my heart for your many kindnesses.

"Yours sincerely,

"Charles Everett Gordon."

I returned the letter in silence, and without looking at her. For myself, I could have burst out sobbing, or torn my hair in despair, had not such proceedings been utterly ridiculous as the result of a formal note of farewell from Charlie's uncle. At which, moreover, Charlie

himself, who came in shortly afterward, did not seem in the least surprised.

"Poor old fellow! he is so restless, he never settles anywhere. My only wonder was that he stayed here so long."

And so the matter was put aside. We found on inquiry that Major Gordon had packed up his portmanteau at night—it really seemed a part of himself, that old portmanteau!—and started at eight the next morning, leaving no address.

And so the wave of life closed over him, and more than him. Even Charlie and I soon forgot him, for we were young and happy, and had a great deal to talk about and arrange. Miss Trotter too was busy, as she always was; and I saw little of her all day long. But at night, when Charlie and I crept into a corner to carry on our harmless love-making, I caught sight of her, sitting opposite the empty chair, doing nothing, her hands folded on her lap, in an attitude—was it of peace, of patience, or only resignation?

After that, during the few days I stayed, we mentioned Major Gordon very seldom, and then only in the most cursory and superficial way. Once, when, as no second letter came, I carelessly accused him of "forgetting" us, she answered with grave reproof:

"No, that is not likely. He is one of the few who never forget. Perhaps, as Charlie suggested, he found Dover—and us—a little dull, and was glad to get away. But," with a quiver of the lip, "he need not have spoken of my 'kindness.'"

PART III.

I HAD been married over two years. If I did not absolutely adore my Charlie, nor he me, as in our silly sweet courtship days, we loved one another in a sensible, rational way, which was far better. We had found out all each other's faults, crotchets, and foibles—quarrelled, and got over it. To suppose that married people never quarrel is simple nonsense, but then, if they have any common-sense and right feeling, they will soon get over it—all the more perhaps from the feeling that they *must* get over it.

It may be a commonplace and unsentimental view of things, but, as I often tell Charlie, I believe that once or twice during our first year of married life, if he could have got rid of me, he would have done it. And I—well, I won't say. But as we could not get rid of one another, but were obliged to run quietly together, like two hounds in a leash—why, we did it, and so learned to make the best of one another, as I trust we shall always continue to do.

And we made more than the best, if possible, of our little son when he came—our "son and heir," though we had not much for him to be heir to! We resolved that he should be Charles Everett Gordon, the third of the name now extant; which reminded us that we ought to give him for godfather his great-uncle, Major Gor-

don. And as, being a boy, he only required one godmother, it was a difficult and delicate question as to who that important personage should be. My mother said she was too old, and besides she had about seventeen other godchildren. We were in considerable perplexity, when Charlie suddenly suggested Miss Trotter.

I hesitated, which made him very angry. (N.B. If my husband has a fault, it is that he always likes everybody to agree with him in everything, especially his wife.)

"Why not, Decie? What extraordinary notion have you got into your head? Why not, I ask? Because you think she'll think that you think she ought to provide for him, or at least to educate him? which she might easily do, rich woman as she is, with not a relative in the world."

I protested, with entire sincerity, that no such idea had ever entered my mind. In truth, her riches were the last thing one thought of in relation to Miss Tommy. My reasons had been altogether different. But I did not give them. I never could see that even the most loving wife has a right to tell her husband other people's secrets. Also, as I once heard Miss Trotter say, a secret discovered by chance should be kept as sacredly as if it had been specially confided.

So I let Charlie say his say—dear hot-tempered young villain as he is!—and then mildly suggested that the plain truth was our best course—it often is. Why not write to Miss Trotter, saying that we asked her for pure love, that we did not want her to do anything for our boy, not even to give him a christening fork and spoon?

"That silver spoon which was not in his mouth when he was born, I fear!" laughed Charlie. "And we will say the same thing to Uncle Gordon, and tell her what

we have said. She can't suppose we want to get anything out of him. She knows—for I told her myself—that he is as poor as a church mouse."

The letters were written, and an answer in the affirmative came to both, amusing Charlie extremely.

"Such formal, old-fashioned epistles. They may well come from an old maid, and an old—well, Uncle Gordon is as good as a bachelor. But I dare say both will feel kindly enough to the little fellow. And at any rate we have paid them the compliment."

Which, in the pride of our youthful parenthood, we considered a very great compliment indeed. We were glad to pay it, having seen but little of either Miss Trotter or Major Gordon since our marriage, at which they were both present. Directly afterward Miss Trotter had gone to Sycamore Hall, her country place, which she did not much care for. It was of the genteel villa order, only a dozen miles from London by rail. But she stayed there longer than usual, having lent her Dover house to some invalid friends, of whom she always had a large stock on hand. The poor, the helpless, the sick, the sorrowful, always gravitated toward her as by a natural impulse. She said it was one of the compensating laws of Providence, to give her that great stronghold of solitary lives—something to do.

For Uncle Gordon, whether he did anything or nothing, we could not find out. I fear, alas! that in our young happiness we did not trouble ourselves overmuch to find out. We resided in barracks at Chichester, he in London. He had enough to live upon—we knew that—at least enough for a man of his simple and almost ascetic habits. And he was "eccentric," Charlie said. He did not like to be interfered with; so when, instead of giving us his address at the lodgings which we sup-

posed he had, he only gave it at his club, we accepted the fact, and thought no more about it or him.

> "Evil is wrought by want of thought,
> As much as want of heart."

And so it befell that, without intending it, we had actually never seen these two dear old friends, nor, I believe, had they seen each other, since my marriage-day, until we all met at the church on the day of my boy's christening.

It was a London Church, for my mother had insisted on having me with her when baby was born, and it was dull and gloomy as London churches often are. But there seemed to come sunshine into it with the arrival of baby's godmother.

Miss Trotter had driven up from Sycamore Hall. When she entered, in her soft gray dress, her white bonnet and shawl, I thought she looked as pretty as ever; and when she took baby in her arms, admired and kissed him, her smile was as bright and innocent as his own (dear lamb that he was! and of course the finest baby that ever was seen); but afterward it seemed to me she was both paler and thinner, and a good deal aged, since those happy days at Dover.

However, I alone noticed this. Charlie approved of her very much, and whispered that she looked "a regular fairy godmother." But at this moment there marched up the aisle, a little late and hurried, though upright and military-looking as ever, Major Gordon.

He seemed confused among us all; shook hands with me as if he scarcely knew me, and bowed to Miss Trotter and my mother as if uncertain who they were, until I explained, saying that the former was to be godmother. Then he shook hands with her warmly.

"I beg your pardon; I really did not know you, I am growing so blind."

She looked up at him with a sudden, startled air. I too recalled with almost a "stound" of pain how Charlie and I had laughed over his bad, irregular writing; and how I had quite forgotten what he once told me, and which I had smiled over as a morbid fancy, that in course of years he would infallibly pay the penalty of his Egyptian experience, and perhaps lose his sight entirely.

Was it that—was it because he could not see how shabby his clothes were, that he looked so untidy, so unlike himself? And did anybody notice this?

But I had no time for speculation or for contrition. The ceremony began. The sponsors—my young brother was the third—took their places round the font; and Uncle Gordon, standing by Miss Trotter's side, repeated after her, with great unction and earnestness, his part in the service. When it was ended, he even condescended, guided by her, to kiss the little morsel of humanity for whom he had made these vows.

"And I mean to keep them," said he, in his direct and simple way; "or if I fail, she will. The third Charles Everett Gordon shall turn out better than both the two former—eh, Charlie?"

He was very cheerful, and seemed glad to come among us again, and proud to be a great-uncle and godfather. When we returned to my mother's we had a most merry christening breakfast—"almost like a wedding breakfast," Charlie declared, if there had been a bride for the infant bridegroom. So after the health of the hero of the feast had been given, he gave that of the godmother; whereupon Major Gordon rose, with great dignity and grace, and returned thanks for Miss Trotter, referring to

the many years he had known her, his exceeding respect for her, etc., etc.—a series of the usual kindly commonplaces, but said with an earnestness very pleasant to see.

She listened, much as people do listen under such circumstances, with her eyes fixed on the table-cloth ; but her hand, when I took it, clutched mine with a nervous grasp as if I were something to hold by, while everybody and everything went drifting away.

She had obeyed our request literally, and brought baby nothing but her blessing. Uncle Gordon, however, touched me exceedingly by giving me, just before he left, a silver coral and bells.

"Take it—it belonged to my little girl that died," was all he said, and went away.

To think that after all these years—thirty at the least—he should have kept something of his dead child's, whom everybody else had long forgotten ! But, as Miss Trotter once said of him, he "never forgot." And I vowed to myself that I too would never forget, but in years to come would try to do all I could for Uncle Gordon.

Alas ! resolutions melt away, especially when one is not strong and has a good many cares. My baby fell ill, and during the days and weeks of suspense that I hung over his little cradle, feeling that the spark of flickering life, which was nothing to the outside world, was everything to me, I never thought of other lives. His godfather quite passed from my remembrance, and his godmother too, until one day, when he had fairly turned the corner, and began to get well, I was told that Miss Trotter was below waiting to see me.

How I rushed into her arms ! What torrents of thankful tears I wept upon her shoulder ! How much I had to tell her—of baby's danger, his beauty, his sweetness

—the heartbreak it would have been to lose him—all *my* griefs, *my* hopes, *my* joys—as I had always been accustomed to talk about to her. But so did everybody.

She listened, as she always listened to everybody, with that keen quick sympathy of hers, entering into everything as if there were, for the time being, no other interest in the wide world. My mother had been very kind—we were in her house all this time—but then she was a busy mother of a family, and a fashionable lady besides. Now, Miss Tommy was a woman, which not all are who call themselves so; and not every real mother has so much of the motherly heart as she.

I said so to her, thanking her for having come all the way to London to see me, such a deal of trouble for an old lady to take.

"Yes. I am an old lady now—I can do as I like," she answered, smiling. "But I did not come up from Dover, I am at Sycamore Hall still. I had—business."

"Other folks' business of course! You may not always 'love your neighbor as yourself,' but you wear out your life for him all the same. Uncle Gordon always used to say so."

"It was about your Uncle Gordon I wanted to speak to you, Decie, if you can spare me ten minutes."

Saying this, she looked so sad, so grave, that suddenly I remembered, with a pang of contrition, my good resolutions on the christening day, entirely forgotten since.

"Is anything amiss with Uncle Gordon? Surely nothing has happened?"

"No, my dear, nothing serious; but I am afraid there is a good deal amiss with him, and I waited to consult you about it, as soon as your own trouble was over."

And then she told me—what I ought to have known already—what Charlie and I ought to have had the

sense to find out, how *she* found it out, Heaven only knows! that Uncle Gordon had been far from well of late; that he was living in shabby London lodgings, alone, uncared for, in much discomfort, if not in actual poverty. No wonder! We all knew his income was small, requiring the utmost management to make it do at all, and how could he manage with his failing sight and advancing years? how could he save himself from falling a prey to dishonest servants and unscrupulous landladies?

"He cannot take care of himself, and there is nobody to take care of him. What can be done, Decie?"

"I will go and see him." And I started up in remorse. "Poor Uncle Gordon! To think that we, his own people, have forsaken him, while you—but I must go to him at once."

"Will you take me with you?" she said it almost as if asking a favor. "I have the address, somewhere in St. Pancras—and—there is a cab waiting outside. Shall we go?"

"Ah! that is so like you. When you want to do a good deed, you do it at once."

"My dear," she answered, with a faint smile, "the young may wait—the old cannot."

So, ashamed of my hesitation, I ran up-stairs, to find my baby sleeping the peaceful sleep of convalencence. There was no reason why I should not go, so I went.

She had waiting only a common cab; her own comfortable carriage and sleek horses would have indeed startled the natives of that narrow street—one of the many semi-genteel streets which lie between Russell Square and King's Cross, free from shops and chiefly let as lodgings; perfectly respectable, but oh! how un-

utterably dreary! Especially on the shady side, where we found the number we were in search of; aided by a woman who went crying, "Strawberries! strawberries!" down the long, hot pavement, the only indication that summer was at hand.

But no spring or summer, no sunshine or fresh, sweet air, ever came into those dark, dirty rooms, which were all Major Gordon had of "home."

Miss Trotter looked up at the gloomy windows with a sigh. "After all his happy youth, all his long wanderings, this!" I heard her say, as if more to herself than me; and then we entered.

"Two ladies a-wanting to see old gen'leman in parlor," screamed the little lodging-house servant, as if with intense astonishment at such a visit.

He needed to be a "gentleman" to face it. Rousing himself, half asleep, from an old leather arm-chair, wrapped in a once gay but now most shabby Indian dressing-gown, his hair unkempt, his beard neglected—dull, untidy-looking—everything, in short, but dirty, which would have been impossible to the dainty habits of the dear old man. He rose up—tall, gaunt, more like Don Quixote than ever, none the less so from his never-forgotten knightly courtesy.

"To what am I indebted—I mean, who is doing me this honor?"

"Oh, Uncle Gordon, it's only me—Decie—and—and Miss Trotter."

"Miss Trotter!" I could see him start. "It is very kind of Miss Trotter to come and see me here."

They shook hands; and I think neither he nor she noticed my bad grammar—nor indeed anything about me at all—for the moment.

He was evidently very glad to see us—her especially.

Looking round the room for a chair and finding none, he pushed forward the arm-chair.

"It is not so very uncomfortable, especially when one is asleep, as I fear I was when you entered. These long afternoons one gets tired, I find. Allow me."

With the air of a Bayard he placed her in the chair, felt for a footstool, and put it under her feet, then turned to me and thanked me warmly for coming to see him.

"But how did you find me out? I never gave any address. I thought the club was sufficient," added he, returning to his hard, dry, dignified manner. "This is not exactly a—a palace in which to receive ladies."

I made some excuse about Miss Trotter's having heard where he lived, and that he had not been well, so we were anxious. Then I darted at once into my own affairs, and how ill his godson had been, occupying his attention entirely for two or three minutes. Meanwhile Miss Trotter sat in the arm-chair with her veil down.

I could have cried almost when I looked at Uncle Gordon, and then at the wretched lodging-house parlor, grimy and gloomy, with just the ordinary shabby lodging-house furniture—a table, six chairs, and a horse-hair sofa. No pictures, no books, no adornments of any kind. Such an air of dreary neglect about everything; even the half-eaten mid-day dinner being left on the table where it was laid, as if nobody could take the trouble to fetch it away. Yes, I—even I—could have wept; what must it have been with others?—those who knew him when he was young, like my Charlie. Would Charlie—would my little Carl ever come to this?

And yet, wreck as we found him, sitting—as he half comically, half bitterly said, pointing to the *débris* of dinner—"like Marius among the ruins of Carthage," there was a dignity, a patience, even a sweetness in his

look that made it impossible to pity him. The feeling concerning him was something quite different—something that dried the tears in one's eyes, and made one involuntarily use a softer tone in speaking, and be more punctilious than ever in what one said to him, as if he had been a duke or a prince instead of a poor, broken-down, half-pay officer.

He gave us tea—the nastiest tea and the saltest butter I ever tasted. What would Charlie have said to them? But they might have been nectar and ambrosia, by the way he offered, and Miss Trotter officiated at, that miserable meal. He had asked her to do so, and when she took off her veil and gloves and sat down to that feminine duty, she seemed to make a "sunshine in a shady place."

It was a very shady place indeed. "This room has a north aspect, the sun never enters it," said Major Gordon. "The other side of the street is brighter, but then lodgings are much dearer, and, besides, it is very little matter to me; I am quite content here."

"Sweet are the uses of adversity." In all that visit I never heard him say one of the bitter things of which he used to say so many at Dover. But now something seemed to have softened him, and made him less restless and irritable. Was it the long solitude, or the shadow of coming blindness, of which he spoke with such composure that I was amazed?

"I try my best, Decie, but I fear I am growing more helpless every day. I doubt if I shall be competent to pass an opinion upon my godson's beauty if I do not come to see him very soon."

"You must come," I eagerly urged. "Why not? You can have almost nothing to do."

"Nothing that I can do—reading and writing are be-

coming impossible. Yes, the days are rather long; that is why you found me asleep, I suppose."

"Do you never go out?" asked Miss Trotter, gently.

"Oh, yes; regularly every day. I do not want to get ill and fall a burden upon other folk before my time. And my doctor in India told me I should always be able to see light, as oculists call it, so as to find my way about, which is a great comfort. For the rest, when one knows the worst, one can always face it, at least, when one is old and has not much to lose. It is the young who are frightened, is it not, Miss Trotter?" added he, turning to her with a smile, and repeating his thanks. "It was so kind of you to take all this trouble, when, I fear, I have neglected common politeness."

"But not kindness," she answered. "Your old landlady, Mrs. Wilson, can never be grateful enough to you for getting her son that situation in London. She will bless you, she says, to her dying day."

"Then I am sure I hope I shall be blessed for a long time. Will you tell her so when you go back to Dover?"

"Suppose," said Miss Trotter, after a moment's hesitation, "you were to tell her yourself?"

"What do you mean?"

"Her lodgings have stood empty a long time. It would be a great advantage to her if some one who gave little trouble, like yourself, some one she could rely on—poor widow woman as she is—would take her two rooms. Dover may be dull—I dare say you found it so—but it is pleasanter than London in hot weather; and Mrs. Wilson's rooms are very comfortable."

"Yes; and I liked the green bank in front and the green churchyard—my quiet neighbors I called them—behind. Yes—but—No!"

"By and by I hope to have Decie with me; also your godson. Isn't it your duty to come and see that the boy is brought up in the way he should go?"

"He cannot fail to be, with such a mother—and such a godmother," said Major Gordon, bowing to each of us in his old formal way. But he said no more about Dover and Mrs. Wilson, nor did Miss Trotter. The pained look on her face, which he could not see, and her silence, which he did not seem to notice—I understood both, and wondered, angrily, Is there a man in the world who is worth a woman's devotion?

Major Gordon talked a good deal more, asking numerous questions about Charlie and the boy, and scarcely speaking of himself at all. He seemed very quiet, very patient, but as if he had lost all interest in life, and was just drifting on from day to day, without troubling himself much about anything.

We rose at last.

"Pardon! but I must go with you till you find a cab. I will not detain you a minute."

He did, though—a good many minutes, poor fellow! till he emerged from the next room spruced up—his old self in some degree—as thin and upright and military-looking as ever, and showed us out with great state, explaining, in answer to some remonstrances, that we need not be in the least uneasy about him—with the help of his stout stick he could pilot himself anywhere.

"I have not sunk to a dog and a string yet, you see, though it may come to that—who knows? And I am very careful of stumbling. I have stumbled a good deal in my lifetime, but I keep a firm footing now. I mean to be independent as long as ever I can."

And then with exceeding earnestness I urged him to

come and stay a little—a good while—all summer—with Charlie and me, his own flesh and blood.

"Do you really mean it?" said he, in a touched voice. "Would not you young people weary of me? But yet, as you say, I am your own flesh and blood."

"And you will come?"

"Perhaps." And then, with a hearty "Good-by, and thank you," he parted from us. We passed him as we drove, feeling his way carefully with his stick. Hearing the wheels, he paused a moment and took off his hat with his old stately air.

"Poor Uncle Gordon! I do hope he will come."

"Yes, to Chichester—not Dover. He cares only for his own flesh and blood. Many people are like that," Miss Trotter added, hastily. "It is—a fine quality to have."

"Uncle Gordon has innumerable fine qualities," I said. "But"—I couldn't help adding—"if I had had the making of him, I think I would have made him—a little different."

Miss Trotter said she was going straight home. What a contrast that luxurious, empty Sycamore Hall must be to the "home" we had just quitted! So I left her at Victoria Station, sole occupant of a comfortable, first-class carriage, looking so sweet in her rich black silks, her soft whites and grays—just the dress for an elderly lady who wishes—and rightly wishes—to look "lovely" to the end. Outwardly she was the picture of peace and prosperity; but after she had bade me a smiling good-by, I saw—what she did not mean me to see—the weary face, the clutch of the clasped hands pressed tightly together, as when we nerve ourselves to bear an almost unbearable pain.

Yet there was nothing to do, nothing to say. It was

one of those "mysterious dispensations of Providence," as people call them, in which no one can interfere except Providence; and the only safe plan is to sit still and hold one's tongue.

I carried my son home in triumph to Chichester, and all the ladies of the regiment declared that there never was such a baby! At least, they told me so—in which opinion I agreed. And even now, in spite of the six which came after, I hold the flower of my flock to be Charles Everett Gordon the third.

That his godfather and namesake did not come and see him was a great blow to my maternal pride. I wrote several touching letters, setting forth the perfections of the young gentleman, and asking no answer except the welcome sight of our dear old uncle; but neither that nor any other reply came. Then Charlie, happening to be a day in London, called, missed him, and came back indignant at the folly of any man's burying himself in such a "horrid hole."

"But then Uncle Gordon was always eccentric, and did not care a pin for outside things"—which was a great eccentricity to my dear, matter-of-fact Charlie. "He cannot be ill, for he was out walking. I left my card, with a message that we hoped to see him at Chichester immediately. If he does not come, it must be because he does not care to come, and we must just leave him alone. It is the only way."

I was not so sure of that, and I did not leave him alone, but wrote again and again; in vain. After that, feeling that there was no more to be done, unwillingly I sank into silence.

The hot summer days came and went. In August my boy began to flag a little, and by September I was sure he needed sea air. So, after thinking of the mat-

ter on all sides—not wholly on my own side, for my baby, instead of making me more selfish, seemed to have knocked the selfishness out of my heart, and opened it to other people's sorrows and cares—I wrote to my dear Miss Tommy, and proposed that we should come to Dover, to Mrs. Wilson's lodgings, which were good enough for us, as they had once been for Major Gordon.

"And then we should be no trouble to you," I added, "for you might not like a baby in the house."

Which was a great piece of hypocrisy on my part, for who on earth could object to such a domestic sunbeam as my little Carl? Though he was not quite as silent as sunbeams—he shouted, cooed, laughed, and, very occasionally, cried. Still, though politeness made me disguise my opinion, I felt he would be a great attraction in any old maid's house, and was neither surprised nor sorry when Miss Trotter wrote that we must come to East Cliff and nowhere else. So we came.

There was no change in the place or the house, except that by some miraculous agency my former bedroom had been turned into a nursery! But there was a great change in me—from the idle, sentimental, love-sick girl to the busy wife and mother, who had won from Fate all she craved. Was it worth the winning? Do we ever find a fulfilled desire as perfect as we thought it?

But let me not lightly condemn either myself or my Charlie. If in some things I had not gained exactly what I expected, I had gained much that I did not expect—experience, which is a possession in itself; a full, busy, active life, in which one has hardly time to consider whether it is a perfectly happy life or not. Also, I had gained, in a sense, myself; had learned to guide and control myself, which is the great secret of guiding and governing others. In so doing I had also learned

to live out of myself, and in and for others—the real mystery and best blessing of marriage.

"No ; don't imagine I ever wish I had not been married," said I one day to Miss Tommy, when I had been opening up to her a fardel of cares domestic, small in themselves, but amounting oftentimes to a heavy burden, such as unmarried girls—free, careless creatures ! —can hardly understand. "How people can ever go on making novels and plays end with marriage, and dismiss their characters to live happy ever after, passes my comprehension ! But for all that—for all that——"

I looked at my sweet Carl, asleep on his rug on the shingle, with an umbrella over him, and thought of his kind young father, who was so proud of him and so fond of him, in an ignorant, masculine way. And I felt that, spite of all cares, mine was the true life, the natural life ; that I had need to rejoice in it, and to thank God for it, as I hope I did.

We were sitting on the shore just in front of Miss Trotter's house—our usual morning encampment—with books and work, though, I fear, we did little at either, but sat watching the waves, in sleepy peace, migrating backward from time to time—not being of the courtiers of Canute tribe, to make believe that our individual wills could control the routine of the universe. How little can any one life fashion its destiny ! except so far as it takes its lot into its own hands, accepts it, and makes the best of it.

I had not to look far for an example of this. Coming back with clearer eyes to my old haunts, I admired more than ever my dear Miss Tommy. I enjoyed, too, having her all to myself, at least, so far as was possible in her busy life. It seemed, however, a little less busy than it used to be, and she herself less active and ener-

getic. More than once she owned to being "tired." And when I suggested that she had come to the time of rest, and ought to rest, she did not deny it, unless by a faint smile, and a whisper of "Not yet; not just yet, my dear." And as she sat beside me on the shingle, ostensibly keeping guard over Carl's slumbers, and knitting the while, I noticed that her eyes were often neither on the child nor her work, but fixed with a quiet sadness on the shining water—the "illimitable sea without a bound"—which, I think, when people come to the verge of this our little life they seem to yearn to, as if it reminded them of that eternity which, we pray, may satisfy all that was incomplete in time, and, in some way or other, round our poor, petty existence as the ocean rounds the world.

Though I had been at Dover some days, and we had had a great deal of talk, we had never once spoken of Uncle Gordon till this morning, when, missing my daily letter from my husband, and knowing he was to go up to London on the Saturday, I wondered whether anything had gone wrong, and communicated my doubts to my companion.

Miss Trotter looked up. "The Monday letters come in late from London." She took out her watch. "They will arrive in five minutes. Stay here, Decie, while I go and fetch them."

And she watched me while I tore open Charlie's; feeling glad to see his dear, old, ugly scrawl again, more illegible than ever, as if he had written in great haste. (He must have done so, for he never mentioned Carl.)

"'I want you to come up to London and see Uncle Gordon. He has fallen into the hands of a confounded quack, who promises to cure his weak sight, but it seems more a case of kill than cure. He won't listen to me;

he may to you, or perhaps to Miss Trotter, if you could get her to come. He has evidently a great respect for her judgment. Bring her, and come at once.'

"It is impossible!" I cried. "Leave my Carl for two days! what is Charlie thinking of? How stupid men are, even when husbands and fathers! Impossible!"

Miss Trotter, who had sat down on the shingle, rose up. There was a new energy in her movements, a new brightness in her eyes.

"My dear, let us try if we cannot make it possible. I will go with you, and Carl too; the journey will not harm him, and he can stay with a friend of mine in London"—my mother was abroad. "Let me see. The next train starts in two hours. Could you be ready?"

There was no resisting her quiet resolution. "We'll try," I said, and rose.

"You will never regret it. Look here"—she pointed out a postscript which I had not noticed in Charlie's letter. "'Unless you come at once it may be too late. The operation is fixed for Tuesday.'"

"And this is Monday. Poor Uncle Gordon!"

"It must not be too late," Miss Trotter said. "We will go to him to-night, and get him to come right away from London—here, perhaps. You must persuade him, Decie."

"*You* must," Charlie said.

"Oh, no; he only cares for his own people," was the answer, with a sad kind of smile.

How we managed it I hardly knew, but we did manage it: we caught our train, and arrived safely in London. She took me to her "friend," an old servant, who had married from her house, and who now let most comfortable lodgings. There we established Carl and his nurse, Miss Trotter waiting patiently beside me till my

screaming little angel was put to bed and asleep, and myself fed, rested, and refreshed—how she thought of me in all those little things! Then she said, "Shall we go?" and we went.

It was an August evening—sunless, airless—all the more dreary because one knew that the sun was setting and the breezes blowing somewhere in the world; somewhere that one might get to, and yet could not. I often think the saddest of all wants or losses is a loss that one feels to be needless.

"Why will he shut himself up in this miserable dull street," I cried, as we entered it, "when he might make himself so happy among us? His life is not near done yet."

"No; look!"—she grasped my hand. "Is not that he at the door?"

It was, indeed, poor Uncle Gordon—taller, thinner, shabbier than ever, I thought—standing on his doorstep, with his head raised, staring up at a bright glimmer of light, the last ray of sunset caught by the attic windows opposite. He watched it till it vanished, and then, feeling his way with his stick, walked slowly down the street. But he did not see us till I touched him, nor recognize us till I mentioned our names.

For the moment a gleam of pleasure crossed his face —"Oh, how good! how kind!"—and then the light faded. "How did you come, and why? Did Charlie say anything?"

I answered—as Miss Trotter had decided I should answer, if necessary; for it was the truth, though not all the truth—"Since you will not come and see your godson, I have brought him to see you; at least, I shall bring him to-morrow morning."

"To-morrow? That will be too late." He could not

restrain a slight shudder. "Did not Charlie tell you?"

"We know it all, and we have come to talk with you about it," said Miss Trotter, in her firm, soft voice; and I saw her, to my surprise, put her arm through his, and guide him across the street corner. He, too, seemed surprised, and then he pressed the hand close to his side, with a sort of acknowledgment of the kindness, and as if he found a certain comfort in it.

"I was going out for my evening walk—my last; for I am to be shut up some weeks in total darkness. Indeed, who knows if I may ever see again? It is just a chance; but I think it right to take it; do not you?"

"I am not sure."

"But I must take it," said he, irritably. "I am growing so helpless; and if I have to live on for the next five, ten, twenty years—no, no, thank God, not twenty! But even five would be too many, as I am now."

He spoke in such intense despondency that I was frightened. I did not understand trouble—I had seen so little of it in my young life—or morbid melancholy; for Charlie, bless him! takes everything easily, and is the cheeriest, most light-hearted soul! but my dear Miss Tommy, she was familiar with sorrow, as all sorrowful people instinctively knew. I fell behind a little, leaving the two "old folks" to walk on together.

Soon Major Gordon stopped. "How thoughtless of me! You will be tired this close evening. Shall we go back to my lodgings?"

"Or shall we go into Regent's Park, close by? It will be cooler there."

"Just as you choose."

He contentedly submitted to be led, and his companion, with a new impulse, as it were, took the leading

of him. She was usually rather a silent person, especially with Major Gordon; but now she talked, and got him to talk. I heard him tell her, as if it were a relief, all he had suffered of late—the weary helplessness, the intolerable irritation of compelled idleness.

"If I were a feeble old man it might be easier, but I am not feeble. I can walk miles and miles. Sometimes I go on walking for hours, round and round the Regent's Park; the park-keepers must take me for the Wandering Jew, or one of the wild beasts escaped from the Zoological Gardens. I almost think I see myself, like the brown bear there, pacing to and fro everlastingly in his cage—nothing to hope for, nothing to do. That is the worst of it," turning suddenly round upon her as she sat beside him on the bench, in that long avenue which makes Regent's Park a pleasant place even in the dullest summer evenings. "Fancy—you, who have such a busy, bright life—what it must be to have nothing to do all day long; to sit thinking, thinking, till your head whirls round; to go back and back upon your whole life, and see all the mistakes of it, too late to remedy——"

"Is it too late? Is anything ever too late while life and strength last?"

"But they may not last long, and then I shall fall a helpless burden upon somebody. But no; I'll take care it never comes to that. For the burden I am to myself"—he stuck his stick fiercely into the turf, as if he were slaying an enemy—"I only wonder sometimes that I have not blown my brains out."

Here I could not help a little cry.

"No, my kind niece; no, my good old friend," said Uncle Gordon, patting our hands as he sat between us; "you need not be afraid. It will never come to that.

I am a Christian man ; and, besides, I must keep up the dignity of the family. It would never do, would it, Decie, for the third Charles Everett Gordon to be ashamed of the first ?"

"He never will! Oh, Uncle Gordon, if you would only come to us ; to baby and me ; we are staying with Miss Trotter, and you might go to your old lodgings, and Mrs. Wilson would be delighted to take care of you."

"I don't want anybody to 'take care' of me," was the sharp answer ; and then he begged my pardon. "Ah, yes, I do ; I feel I do ; but—however, perhaps to-morrow——"

"It is a great risk."

"No more than the risk of a battle ; one conquers or dies."

"Or lives on, wounded and useless, which is much harder than dying."

"You are right, Miss Trotter ; I never thought of that."

"If this man—you own he is a quack—should fail : if he should leave you worse than before, which he says he may, what then ?"

"Nothing. I shall have done it by my own choice, and the result matters to nobody."

"Is there any human being who can say, who dare venture to say, that his well-being matters to nobody ?"

He seemed startled, uneasy. She went on.

"To throw up one's life, saying it belongs to one's self alone, is some people's creed, I know ; but is it not a very selfish one ? Ought we not to do the best we can with the life Heaven gives, until Heaven takes it away ? But I did not mean to preach—I am not good at preaching—only to suggest a practical idea."

"You were always good at practical ideas," he answered, with a smile. "Say on."

She explained that she had a friend—the first oculist of the day. With so many invalids on hand she had no end of friends among doctors. She proposed to bring the great man for a consultation with the other one, who could not possibly object to this before anything was done.

"Give me his address; he shall be written to, and the whole trouble taken off your hands," added this Machiavelian woman. "It will only be a day's delay, and then if you still wish for the operation"—she glanced up at his poor, dim eyes—beautiful eyes they must have been when he was young—and shivered, like a mother who feels cruelly in every nerve every hurt to the child—"you will have at least the satisfaction of having done nothing that was not inevitable."

"You are right," he said.

"She always is right," I added, eagerly; but Miss Tommy laid her hand on my mouth, took out her tablets, wrote down the address he gave, then asked him to put us in a cab, and we would go home.

"I am glad to be of some use still," he said, rising. "I shall see you to-morrow. You will bring the great man? I can afford to pay him. Just this one more chance!"

He breathed hard, as if a weight were taken off his mind, and, thanking us warmly for all our kind thought of him, he bade us adieu.

"Poor Uncle Gordon!" I sighed once more. But she did not sigh. She said nothing, yet I thought I saw a change in her dear face, of something—not exactly happiness, but what I had heard her say was better—blessedness.

The ass in the lion's skin—we afterward found out how great an ass he was, and how completely he had

taken in the simple old soldier—did not stay to face the great lion, but sent word that he had to go to a case a hundred miles off, and could not attend the consultation.

"I thought as much," laughed Miss Trotter's eminent friend, when he heard the name. "You will never see any more of him." And we never did.

The great doctor was a character, as most great doctors are. When we brought him into Major Gordon's dull room his large, kindly presence seemed to carry sunshine with it—mental and moral. He took by storm the sickly, morbid, nervous man, encouraged him by pleasant words, and then proceeded to business.

"I must have some one of you with me. Who will stay?"

"I will," said Miss Trotter, at once, and Uncle Gordon said, "Thank you."

So they turned us out, Charlie and me. For nearly an hour we perambulated the streets, in sore suspense. I might have felt it more had my poor Charlie felt it less, but I never saw him so unmanned. When at last we were summoned back—to no very ill news, as I saw at a glance—Charlie quite gave in, and wrung his uncle's hand with something very like a sob.

"Well, my boy," said Major Gordon, cheerily, "I know the worst now, and no one shall ever say of me, 'A soldier, and afeard.'"

"No, indeed," added the great man. "Mrs. Gordon, I have been giving your uncle here a piece of my mind. He will never see better than he does now, but he may not see much worse, if he lets well alone. Of course, I could try all sorts of experiments, but they would be mere experiments—all might fail; and at his age, I repeat, it is better to let things alone. There is a story

about a man who 'sought not unto the Lord, but unto the physicians'—which means, I take it, that he would not trust Nature, would neither believe in her curative power, nor accept her natural laws of decay. We often do the same thing, and worry ourselves and our friends to death, for fear of dying, until we actually die."

"But it is not a question of dying here. I may live to be ninety, you say. The question is, how I am to face my life—such as it is?"

"My dear friend"—with this honest, good man all his patients were his dear friends—"you have but to live a day at a time, and it will grow easier as you get used to it. I have known many blind men who led the merriest and happiest of lives. And 'better bear the ills you have,' as my dear old Shakespeare tells me, 'than fly to others that you know not of;' which might have been your fate had you risked that operation. We know a good deal—we doctors; but I think the best thing we know, and the cleverest of us learn it soonest, is our own ignorance."

Everybody laughed; and the tragedy melted into comedy.

A few more wholesome advices Miss Trotter's friend gave, one of which was to "clear out of here as fast as possible." And on receiving his fee he put it back on the table, saying that he, a man of peace, made it a point of honor never to take anything from "our national defenders." So, shaking hands all round, he jumped into his carriage and departed. I never see his name in print now without remembering the good deed he did that day.

Charlie, too, departed. "You women will manage all the rest," he whispered. But I could manage nothing; my nerves had been thoroughly shaken. I was glad

Uncle Gordon could not see me, as I sat in a corner and cried. He, too, looked exceedingly pale and exhausted.

But there was one of us whose strength never was exhausted as long as there was anything to be done. Nor her patience—and it required a good deal; for at first he was deaf as an adder to all her charming. Gradually she reasoned him into acknowledging that Mrs. Wilson, and Mrs. Wilson's delicate son, who was a good scholar and a sweet-natured lad, would be useful to him; while his taking possession of his old lodgings would be a very great advantage to them—which, perhaps, was the wisest argument she could use. The sharpest sting of Uncle Gordon's lot seemed to be that he was now, as he said, "of no use to anybody."

"But we will make you of use, Miss Trotter and me, and, at worst, you can play with the baby."

"Is it come to that?" said he, with a hearty laugh, which looked like acquiescence. "And that lad Wilson, who is so to benefit by the pleasure of reading to me, and enjoying my sweet society. I suppose you think, Miss Trotter, that I am like the Countess of Pembroke, and that 'to love me is a liberal education!' A pity the experiment has never been tried. But it would fail—with me everything has failed."

That mixture of bitterness and sadness, with a strange vein of sweetness running through it all, intense gratitude for the smallest kindness, and a thoughtfulness for others which I have never seen in any other man—no, I did not wonder at anybody's loving Uncle Gordon.

Miss Trotter went up to him as he stood at the window, and laid her hand on his arm.

"I don't think I ever asked anything of you in all my life, but I ask you now—Will you come back to Dover with Decie and me?"

There was evidently a struggle in his mind as great as must have been in hers before she made the request; but both were conquered.

Major Gordon took the gentle hand, and pressed it warmly in both his own, saying in a broken voice, "Thank you; yes—I will go."

What a jubilee of a journey it was! How happy he seemed, and how glad she looked to see him happy! And, as I said to Charlie afterward, these elderly folk, when they really do enjoy themselves, do it thoroughly; not like us young people, who are always ready to find a crumpled rose-leaf under all our felicities. But those for whom life is slowly narrowing down to the simplicities of childhood are, like children, contented and amused with little things.

I had not expected Uncle Gordon to take the least notice of his godson, but he did. He even condescended to travel with him and with us, for several stations, before retiring to his smoking-carriage; seemingly much interested in discovering that young Carl had the right number of arms, legs, and fingers—which latter were used in pulling his great-uncle's beard till that respected relative cried for mercy. Nevertheless, when driven from the field, the Major came again and again to our carriage, asking if we were all right, and apparently taking pleasure in being "a family man," as I told him, and having somebody belonging to him to take care of.

"Let me do it," I overheard him saying to Miss Tommy, in some trifling difficulty about the luggage. "Let me do all I can for you, and as long as I can. The hardest thing possible is to be compelled to do nothing."

That sentence struck the key-note, I think, of all our relations with him, during those days which followed—halcyon days, which I look back upon with a peace in-

describable. It was September, the pleasantest month in the year at Dover, where indeed, all months are pleasant; but this month especially, with its clear, bright, cool days, its brilliant sunsets and harvest moonlights; and last, not least, as a variety, its equinoctial storms, when the wind blew and the waves rose, sweeping right over the Admiralty Pier and flooding the esplanade—nay, once pouring in a torrent over the poor flowers in our front garden, and departing, leaving it a wreck till next spring.

"Next spring," said Miss Tommy, with her usual cheerful acquiescence in the inevitable, "we will make it all bright again."

She was in an especially bright mood, and looking better than I had seen her look ever since my marriage. She was a perfect slave to little Carl, managing him as if she had been the mother of ten, instead of an old maid. And she took care of me—for I was not strong—as if she had been my mother. How she found time for everything was a mystery; but, as she said, laughing, "If she couldn't find time, she made it." Thus she made time—an hour every day—to do writing and reading for Major Gordon.

He had taken up his old quarters with Mrs. Wilson, who received him with open arms. Her little house had, I noticed, been made pretty and comfortable from attic to basement, and, as she had no other inmates, she was able to give Major Gordon the range of all her rooms, and devote herself to his comfort in a way which soon showed itself in his changed appearance, even down to his lovely white shirt-fronts, and his good, respectable coats, hats, and boots.

"I can't see them," he said, "but they feel much tidier than they used to be, and I always find them in

the same place, and put them on without any trouble. She almost perplexes me with her gratitude, that poor woman. I can't think why she is so kind to me, and how she continues to make me so very comfortable at so very small a cost."

But I could.

However, I only laughed, and told him he would grow quite a dandy in his old age, now that he had a woman to look after him, to say nothing of that lad Jack, who had installed himself as amateur valet, and did his duty both with pride and affection. For, odd as the old soldier undoubtedly was in his ways—a mixture of irritability and independence that made living with him not always smooth sailing—he had one peculiarity which I only wish were commoner among his sex—he thought so little about himself that he made everybody else think about him. From the eldest to the youngest of the Wilson family there was not one who would not have done anything in the world for the comfort of Major Gordon.

Yes, I repeat, those were halcyon days, to me, who had had a good deal of suffering and care, and to my two companions, who gradually became, in a way I had not noticed before, companions to one another. Not of mornings; Miss Trotter was almost always busy then, and it was not her way to neglect business. She sometimes looked after us with wistful eyes, when she started us off, baby and me, to our encampment on the shore, Major Gordon for his long morning stroll; he grew daily more active and strong, and his eyes did not seem worse, so we said as little about them as possible; but she neither walked with him nor idled with me, until, punctually as the twelve o'clock gun fired, we used to see the little figure emerging from the house, and coming toward us wherever we were—which she always seemed to know.

And then we all sat and chatted together for an hour, till dinner-time.

After dinner we always drove far away inland, or through the flat and dull country—not pretty to look at, but fresh with salt wind, and glimmering with continual glimpses of sea—toward Walmer and Deal. Uncle Gordon always liked the sea best. He said he had been brought up near it in his youth, and had never got over the love of it and the delight in it. The mere "smell of the sea," he sometimes declared, seemed "to kill fifty years," and make him feel like a boy again.

There was at times a curious youthfulness about him still; or it seemed to have sprung up of late, like autumn crocuses. He took an interest in all our proceedings, women as we were. But we were neither silly nor idle women—certainly, one of us was not. Accustomed for years to manage her large fortune entirely herself, Miss Trotter's responsibilities and sphere of action were very wide. Until I listened to her talks with Major Gordon, whose advice and opinion she often asked—for it gave him something to think of, and occasionally his great longing "something to do"—I had no idea how largely useful an old maid's life could be, nor what an important element she was in the community. These were before the days of women's rights. I do not believe Miss Trotter ever dreamed of being made a common-council woman, or of having a seat in Parliament, yet she could have filled both offices better than a good many men I know. Her capacity for business was as great as her delight in it—real delight—the pleasure of seeing things work harmoniously, of employing all her energies, and using—not abusing—all her money, since, as she sometimes said, the one aim of life should be, "Let nothing be lost."

She was never much of a talker, but I noticed that, seeing how dependent Major Gordon naturally was upon conversation, she learned to talk more. And, in spite of her shyness at reading aloud, she taught herself to do it, and, of evenings, often read to us for hours—"in humble emulation of Charlie," she once said, when I, who remembered that last reading of Charlie's and the unlucky consequences which followed it, felt conscience-stricken. But the Major sat impassive, never taking the slightest notice. Perhaps he had entirely forgotten the unfortunate incident—perhaps——

I never was inside a man's heart—very queer articles they must be sometimes! I never knew much of any man except my dear, simple-minded spouse; but I think, if anything ought to have touched a man—not his vanity, not his passions, but that highest and best self of him which all good men have—it would be that which had been given to Major Gordon. However, I have not to judge, only to record.

Day by day went on. Miss Trotter seemed to have the art of filling up every hour with something pleasant. Carl grew into a young Hercules, and I into a very creditable mother of the same. Every day Uncle Gordon appeared with a brighter look and a lighter step. He was indeed, as Miss Trotter always declared, remarkably hale and active for his years. Far more so, as we both gradually found out, than she.

"She seems so tired," he said to me one day. I had not given him credit for noticing the fact—men seldom do know whether we are tired or not. I am sure I might be ready to drop before my dear innocent Charlie would ever find it out—but that is neither here nor there.

"She often is tired," I answered, "only she doesn't say so. She hates to trouble anybody."

"Indeed!" and from that time his hand was always ready to help her across the shingle, his arm to sustain her in our walks up and down the esplanade. He accommodated his quick pace to her slow one, his long strides to her tiny footsteps, turned when she turned, and stopped when she seemed weary.

Those quiet walks, sometimes in sunshine, but oftener in twilight, or even moonlight and starlight—for, on account of his poor eyes, Uncle Gordon liked walking at night—how enjoyable they were! What a fairy picture the old town became, with its circle of glittering lights, echoed by the lights of the Castle and the heights; while on the other side was the ever-moaning sea, a dense black, dotted with masses of white foam, or shining in that mysterious, moon-made "path of rays" which

"We think would lead to some bright isle of rest."

So beautiful, so dream-like, the scene often used to be, that even I, happy wife and mother as I was, with all the blessings of youth close in my grasp, grew sentimental. It was enough to make old people forget they were old—and wish they could begin their life over again—only, with a difference!

"I wonder how it would feel to be like that little man of yours, Decie," said Major Gordon one day, pointing to Carl, who was rolling about on the sea-shore at St. Margaret's. We had taken him with us there, as we were to be several hours away. Uncle Gordon had said he should like to have our tea picnic in a quite new place; and whenever he wished a thing, I noticed that, soon or late, it came about. "Carl, my friend, if my poor old soul could somehow get into your little body, and begin life all over again, what would I do with it?

Miss Trotter"—turning to her as she sat on the shingle—we had investigated the picturesque village and the fine old church, and the steep descent to the little bay, and were sitting down—she always seemed glad to sit down—"Miss Trotter, do you know, I sometimes feel afraid of growing old. Do you?"

"No;" afterward, with a gentle smile and a firmer decision, she repeated, "Oh, no!"

"But you would like to be young? I was always happy when I was young—were not you?"

"Happiness comes to some early, to others late; and perhaps it is best not to think much of happiness at all. One often finds it when one has ceased to look for it."

"But I used to look for it—here, there, and everywhere—eagerly, greedily—and I never found it. And now I am left 'on the bleak shore alone,' as the song says. Solitary, useless, blind, no wonder I am afraid of old age."

It was a good while before she answered, and then it was in a slightly constrained tone.

"I think your fear of the future is needless. As Dr. —— told you, one has but to live a day at a time. Your eyes are never likely to be worse than now; and I have known people who could not see at all, yet were neither dependent nor helpless."

It was the wrong word as she saw, with a sting of pain, when too late to alter it.

"I hate to be helpless," he broke in, almost fiercely; "and as for being dependent, I should loathe it. I mean to do all I can for myself, to my very last breath."

"So do I," was the quiet reply. "I can understand the man—who was it?—that wished to 'die standing.' But one cannot always stand, and stand alone. Some-

times I have to lean pretty hard on Decie there. She does not mind it, and I—I rather like it."

"Thank you," I cried, impulsively clasping the dear little soft hand. I had begun to comprehend the pride and pleasure it is for the young to help the old, though I did not take in as I do now how little we can help them—how many burdens they have to bear which God only can lighten, until, in his own good time, he takes them all away.

It went to my heart to see this dear woman putting out her frail little hand to carry another's burden, as if she had none of her own.

"I think," she said, "old age should be to us a Sabbath after the week's work is done. We should rest, and be glad to rest; we should not try to do more than we can do, and then be angry that we cannot do it. It is better often to accept our infirmities than to struggle against them. They may not be harder than many things we suffered in our youth. I once heard a sorely tried woman say, her greatest trial was that her sufferings were only mental; no sorrow ever made her ill, and it would have been such a relief to be ill! Now, I, who never feel quite well——"

Major Gordon turned to her with a startled air.

"I mean, very seldom. But I always feel quite happy," she added, in her cheerfullest of tones.

And she looked happy. There was now in her faded face a continual peace, deeper even than when I first knew her. Then there was a kind of effort in it, determination to be happy, spite of fate. Now there was none—she was happy. She sat with my boy across her lap; he had tired himself out, and then settled down (truly, though I say it, there never was such a good child as my little Carl!). She kept patting him softly

while she talked; but her eyes looked out far beyond him, beyond us all, to the great wide sea shining in the sun—the sea which she had been so fond of all her life, across which her heart must have fled many a time; but it had no need to do that now.

Major Gordon sat and smoked his pipe, perfectly content. It was touching to see how very content he could be, for a man who had knocked about the world for half a century—he once told us he was a mere boy when he first went out to India. And he was content with such little things—our innocent, childish, tea picnic, and the book afterward. Miss Trotter generally produced a book from her pocket wherever we went; it whiled away the time to him, who could neither scramble about nor enjoy views. And, as he often said, it gave him something to think about.

We had been going through a course of Shakespeare, which he enjoyed with the freshness and simplicity of a boy—he said he had never "cultivated his mind" before, and was determined to do it now, or, rather, we were doing it for him.

"Go on with 'King Lear,' will you, Miss Trotter, if Decie can put up with such a melancholy story? But I have a fellow-feeling for the poor old forsaken king, and the blind Gloucester. You were just at the point where they got to Dover fields, and he wanted to throw himself over the cliff, and Edgar saved him—was it not?"

"Yes; how well you remember!"

So he did, every word she read, with that pleasant voice of hers, "gentle and low, an excellent thing in woman." How Uncle Gordon made us laugh, even in that most pathetic passage over Cordelia, by his emphatic "Yes, so it is!" His listening was the most earnest, absorbing thing, just like a child's.

"Poor old Gloucester. What a take-in it was! And yet it was right. I hope he kept to the 'free and patient thoughts' which Edgar recommended. But it isn't always easy for a blind man to be patient," he sighed. "And that is your Shakespeare's Cliff, Miss Trotter. I remember, you told me to look out for it, the first day I went back to India. I could see it then, I can't now. But I could climb it still, if you would guide me as Edgar did Gloucester. I'll promise not to throw myself over."

He seemed so eager to go, with the restlessness which still came over him at times, though much seldomer than formerly, that Miss Trotter proposed our driving direct from St. Margaret's to Shakespeare's Cliff.

"We should get there before sunset, and the sky looks stormy; we may have the equinoctial gales soon, and our cliffs are not safe in a high wind. "Perhaps we had better not lose this calm day."

"That's right," said Uncle Gordon; "I like doing things at once. I always did. When one is young one hates to lose time."

"And when one is old one has no time to lose."

She rose, gave Carl to his nurse, and soon we were all climbing the steep ascent which leads down to that lovely, lonely bay of St. Margaret's. I noticed how often she paused, and how heavily she sometimes leaned on me, or on the stronger hand which was always at her service now. "Let me help you," Uncle Gordon used to say; "it helps me too, you know."

On our drive home I thought my dear Miss Tommy was rather silent, watching the sunset, which promised to be very fine. Some of the grandest sunsets I have ever seen have been from the hill-road between St. Margaret's and Dover Castle. She pointed it out to me, but

still silently. We had both of us learned not to speak much of pleasures in which poor Uncle Gordon could not share.

I know not why I should call him "poor" Uncle Gordon, for, indeed, I had almost ceased to pity him. He bore his affliction with such patient heroism—the heroism of courage, not stoicism—for he let us help him and guard him as much as ever we liked, except that he was so anxious not to give us "trouble."

When we had deposited Carl and his nurse at home, he was most eager to go on to Shakespeare's Cliff; so we went as far as the carriage could be taken, and climbed the rest—a rather hasty climb, for the sun was sinking fast. Miss Trotter faintly suggested that Uncle Gordon and I should go alone, but he would not hear of it.

"It is an easy ascent, you say, and Decie and I will help you. Oh, no, you must not stay behind. We could not possibly do without you—we never can."

She smiled, and went.

Everybody knows Shakespeare's Cliff—the haunt of Dover shop-girls and shop-boys on Sunday afternoons, and of Dover visitors all the week. Nothing in the least adventurous about it; just a steep down, green and smooth, rising to a peak, where you can look over the sheer, precipitous cliff into the sea. Not now, however,

> "Half-way down
> Hangs he who gathers samphire—dreadful trade!"

Neither do

> "The fishermen that walk upon the beach
> Appear like mice."

Doubtless the cliff is much less grand than it was in Shakespeare's time, if Shakespeare ever saw it; but it is grand still—so dizzy a height that I was not surprised to

see Miss Tommy catch hold again, of her own accord, of the hand which had helped her up. He turned round and smiled.

"Don't be afraid; I shall not jump over, and so 'shake patiently my great affliction off,' like poor old Gloucester. I might have done so once—I don't know—if you had not come and saved me."

Uncle Gordon said this with deep feeling. He stood, holding tightly her hand, while with the other hand he took off his hat and bared his head to the wind, which blew sharp and keen. It was a fine face, a noble face, with its look of quiet heroism, with its smooth brow and shut eyes, turned toward the gorgeous sunset, which, alas! to him was nothing. But he had much enjoyment left still; and, what is rather rare, he seemed to know it and own it.

"People talk of owing their lives to other people, but, Miss Trotter, I think I shall owe you more than my life—the worth of it—if, old as I am, it ever gets to be worth anything; and I hope I shall not forget. But you are shivering—I can feel your hand shake."

It was nothing, she said; only she had been hot with walking, and the wind up here was very cold.

Major Gordon took up his outer coat, and, in spite of all her remonstrances, wrapped her in it. We hurried her down to the carriage, almost carrying her between us, the little "fairy godmother," as he sometimes called her. She laughed at our anxiety, speedily recovered herself, or seemed to do so, and was unspeakably bright and gay all the evening, looking so pretty and so young—I wished Uncle Gordon had had his eyes. As for his heart, it was an article so incomprehensible that by this time I had ceased speculating about it, and given it up in despair.

Next day, for the very first time since I had known her, Miss Tommy did not appear at breakfast. She was not ill, she said, only she felt tired—rather more tired than usual; but she should certainly be up by noon. However, noon came, and she was not up, to the great perplexity of Major Gordon, who appeared, as usual, to have his newspaper read to him.

I had to do it, but he complained that I did not read half so well, nor could understand what he wanted read, as did the "fairy godmother." At which, when I told her, she laughed heartily, and declared that, after going through life without any accomplishments, it was most delightful to have acquired in her old age that most useful one—the art of reading aloud.

"Tell Major Gordon his praise puts me on my mettle. I shall certainly be up to-morrow."

And so she was; but only to find that she was able for nothing more than to lie on the sofa in the sitting-room beside her bed-room—the "parlor" we called it, because such endless talking went on in it; such a ceaseless stream of people usually came to consult her there—people in trouble, people in joy, people wanting money, advice, sympathy, help; continual "wants," which Miss Trotter was expected to supply, and did so, as far as was in her power, every day of every week.

But she could not do it now. She lay, smiling still, and not "*very*" ill, she affirmed, but still unable to see anybody. I had to keep guard at the door—no sinecure! —and tell all visitors that it was "only a chill," and she would be better to-morrow.

"That 'only a chill!'—I don't like it," said Uncle Gordon, who came to the house about six times a day, and sat patiently in the drawing-room, or made himself

useful in amusing little Carl ; for the child took an uncomfortable fancy of crying for his mother. "You see, an old soldier learns to be a bit of a doctor, and I know many a bad illness comes from a mere chill. She must have got it that evening on Shakespeare's Cliff, and it was I who persuaded her to go."

He seemed so distressed, so remorseful, that I made out my anxiety to be less than it really was, and got him to stay the evening. I read to him, talked to him, but it would not do. He could not rest ; he seemed to be perpetually missing her ; indeed, the room looked so empty and felt so silent without her, that I could hardly bear it myself. It was a real relief when, at last, he fell asleep in his favorite arm-chair, for he seemed unwilling to leave the house till the latest possible minute. Not till all was quiet, and I myself the last person up, did I succeed in turning him out, and watching his retreating figure—such a firm, active step it was still !—along the shore.

At eight in the morning he came back again, "just to inquire." He looked sorely troubled to find my invalid was no better, and when I went up to her I could hear him pacing to and fro in the room below, till I almost feared she must hear him too. Once, I was sure she did. She was lying with her eyes shut—asleep, I thought —when she suddenly opened them.

"Is that Major Gordon ? " she asked.

I said "Yes ;" and told her how I could hardly get him out of the house, and how restless and unhappy he was, blaming himself as the cause of her illness.

"Oh, no," with the brightest of smiles. "Tell him I am quite sure to be better to-morrow."

She closed her eyes and went to sleep again, with a look as peaceful as that of my little Carl.

But she was not "better to-morrow," and I insisted on sending for the doctor.

Miss Tommy did not like doctors; busy people, and people not given to trouble much about themselves, seldom do. She said—imitating gayly one of the Scotticisms that even yet Major Gordon occasionally let fall—that "she couldna' be fashed;" that machines would wear out, and had better wear out with as little fuss as possible; but to-day, when I urged our great anxiety—his, as well as mine—she yielded.

I was out when the doctor came; she had sent me for my daily walk with Uncle Gordon. "He must not miss it," she said; "and, besides, sick-nurses ought to go out every day. I have had a great deal of nursing to do in my life, but I never was nursed before," she added, and put up her face to kiss me, like a child. When I returned the doctor had come and gone.

Miss Trotter was lying on her sofa in the parlor. How sweet she looked in her soft gray dressing-gown and close white cap! But her face was turned to the wall. She hardly noticed my entrance, and, when I spoke, moved with a half-startled look, as if I had roused her from sleep or deep thinking. Her cheeks were flushed, and her breathing was quick and hard.

"Decie," she whispered, "the doctor says I am to go to bed and stay there. I think he is right, but I waited till you came in. Also because"—she lifted herself up and looked in my face with a sad, earnest expression—"I want to see Major Gordon, for just five minutes."

I hesitated. In truth, I was shocked to see the change in her.

"It cannot harm him or me. I *must* see him. You can stay. I have nothing, almost nothing, to say to him; but I *must* see him."

And she lay, scarcely moving, with her eyes fixed on the door, until he came.

If I had not loved my Charlie—and yet that was a different sort of love too—I could never have understood that yearning gaze, nor the quick, bright smile, followed by a look of intense content and rest, as Major Gordon sat down beside her, and took her hand in both his—which he sometimes did now both to her and to me—a pathetic sign that the darkness was growing round him, leaving only the sympathy of voice and touch.

I went and sat in the bow-window, watching the long rollers of the tide that curled over and broke against the sea-wall in showers of spray. My full, bright life—as full, bright, ay, and as restless as that tide—and these two quiet lives, all but done, one perhaps, just ebbing away—what a contrast!

"I sent for you," she said, for Uncle Gordon seemed too much moved to utter a word, "because the doctor tells me I shall not be able to see any one for some time, and I thought I should like to see you again, in case—in case—Not that it much matters; but one never knows."

He started. "You do not mean that? Oh, no, no, no! It was the chill on the cliff-top, and I brought you there. It is I that have killed you."

"Not in the least," she answered, strongly and firmly. "You must never imagine such—such utter nonsense. On the contrary," changing her little laugh into earnestness, "something you said then will make me happy; would have made me happy for all my days to come. I wanted to tell you so."

She paused, but he said nothing. She went on:

"Once you asked me if I had had a happy life. No, not very. But I have tried to make the best of it, as everybody can."

"I wish to God I had done so too!"

"You have," she answered, eagerly; "indeed you have. I know it. You thought I knew nothing, but I knew everything, and have known it all along. And I say you have done all you could, in all ways. It has been a comfort to me for years and years, to feel this; to think that there was somewhere in the world, if ever so far away, a man so good as you."

She spoke with difficulty, and with long pauses between, but distinctly and firmly, as people speak on their deathbeds, when they have ceased to have anything to hope for, anything to fear. He could not see her face, but she could see his, and I was glad she could.

"Now, my friend" (as she now and then called him, though generally nothing but Major Gordon), "now you must go."

"Presently. One word—you are not so very ill? You will try to get better?"

"Oh, yes; I will try," speaking in the soothing tone one uses to a child—not unneeded, he being utterly unmanned.

I rose, for I felt he must go.

"Good-bye, then; just for to-day," he muttered. "Good-bye."

And, lifting her hand, he would have kissed it; but she drew him nearer to her, and, putting both her arms round his neck, with unutterable tenderness, she kissed him on the forehead and on the poor blind eyes.

"All my life—all my life!" she murmured, with a smothered passion almost like that of youth. They kissed one another once more, solemnly and lingeringly, as if for an eternal farewell, and then I led him out of the room.

. . . . . .

My dear Miss Tommy did not die. For weeks it was a struggle between life and death, but life gained the victory.

"I wish to live," she said, more than once. "I have so much to live for; so much to do."

And well she might have said this, had she seen the cruel "want" she was in the house, in the neighborhood, even in the outside world. Not till then—for she had never had a dangerous illness in her life—not till then did anybody find out how deeply Miss Trotter was beloved and how widely respected. The rich came in their carriages, the poor on their ragged feet, to her door, and looked up with tears to that silent window, behind which the fight for life was going on. Oh, it was a terrible time, and yet a peaceful one. I came out of it an older and a graver woman—fitter to face life, or death, without being afraid.

I do not think she was afraid—it was not in her nature to be afraid of anything; but I think she would have liked to stay just a little longer, "to do her work," as she said. And I sometimes fancied she was pleased with all those testimonies from outside of what a noble life an "old maid" can live, and how sorely she can be missed, even though she leaves behind neither child nor husband. Very sweet to her were all those tokens of universal love, which an unmarried woman can always win; a love neither of nature nor of blood, but of choice and—let not those who never win it deceive themselves—of deserving.

Slowly and steadily life came back into her dear old face; but it was quite an old face now, the hair perfectly gray and the delicate complexion gone. Nothing was left except her wonderful look of sweetness and peace—an abiding inward peace, never absent now.

Nor did it change when, though she revived to convalescence, we soon began to feel that perfect health, with all its activities, energies, and enjoyments, was never like to be hers any more.

Still, after she came down-stairs, we tried our very best to make everything go on just as before—with, however, a difference.

Of course, all I had guessed, seen, and heard in that supreme moment when she thought she was dying was kept by me as sacred and silent as if I had known nothing. Uncle Gordon never spoke of it to me, nor did she. Whether they ever referred to it with one another, or whether they let it all pass like a dream of the night—which, in truth, to me it sometimes seemed—I cannot tell, and I never heard. When they met, which was as soon as the doctor allowed her to see anybody, it was like ordinary friends—close and tender and tried, but still only friends.

There was no talk whatever of marriage. Such an idea never seemed to have entered into anybody's head regarding them, two such "old people" as they were—Uncle Gordon, with his horrors of matrimony, and Miss Tommy, who had all her days shown such a total indifference to it. But I, who had heard those words, "All my life—all my life!" read the history differently.

Possibly it was his pride, or their mutual shrinking from the world's sneering comments on elderly marriages, or it might have been that she felt her own infirmities, and did not wish to be a burden upon him—for she had pride too, dear soul? But, whatever it was, it was exclusively their own concern, and both seemed entirely satisfied.

They did not marry, yet it was hardly possible to imagine a more perfect union. It did one good to see

them together, and they were now together every day. How her face brightened at the sight of him, and his at the sound of her voice! There was between them that entire sympathy which even married people seldom have—that comfort of companionship which, be it friendship or love, and whether discovered early or late, makes, when found, the utmost blessing of life. All the more that neither of them had any other close ties, except Charlie and me. But, after carefully thinking it over, I decided not to tell my secret, or, rather, their secret, even to Charlie.

They did not marry. And sometimes, when I saw the perfect oneness between them, and how completely they belonged to one another, I felt there was no need they should marry. They were too old for the world to say a hard word against them—indeed, it never noticed them at all. Daily was Uncle Gordon's tall, gaunt figure seen marching up and down the esplanade beside her chair—her illness had been rheumatic fever, and it was long before she could walk. Later on, when she did walk, though very feebly, she was supported by the arm which never failed her; followed, perhaps, by a careless glance or two from the groups of juveniles who haunt the Dover shore; young ladies, and young officers from the Castle, talking, laughing, and flirting together, and possibly calling it "love." How little they understood the word! But these, whose story nobody knew?

Even my Charlie, now settled into a practical man of the world and father of a family, never suspected anything deeper than he saw. Perhaps if he had, he, too, would only have smiled; but he was the best and dearest of husbands, and not a bit jealous of my devotion to Miss Tommy. Indeed, seeing that I was likely to be so

much at Dover, he proposed that we should come and live there; applied for and obtained a semi-military post at the Castle. So we planted ourselves beside her, at which Miss Trotter was very glad.

"I am an old woman now; I want taking care of," she said to me one day. "Others will have to do my work for me. I must learn to be idle, and rest."

But idleness was evidently a great punishment to her. As soon as possible she had resumed her usual "work," as well as that part of it which she had done for Uncle Gordon; such as reading his newspapers to him and writing his letters. But very soon the tables were turned; instead of her helping him, he began to help her.

As I have said, in his youth Major Gordon had an excellent head for business. Soldier as he was, he had accumulated—as in those days the servants of the East India Company had many opportunities of doing—a considerable fortune. It had all been wasted, and not by himself; but he never spoke of this, and I need not.

Still, his shrewdness and clear-headedness remained, rather increased than diminished by his dim sight—nay, having once accepted his infirmity, he, with his orderly and methodical soldierly habits, succeeded in making the very best of it. It was astonishing how much he did, and was happy in doing, aided by his faithful secretary Jack Wilson.

So I was scarcely surprised when, one day, calling me into her room, the parlor, where they usually spent their mornings, sometimes with Jack to do writing for them, sometimes she and Major Gordon alone, the dear godmother said:

"Decie, we want to tell you something"—both often said "we" now. "We have come to the conclusion

that my life is rather too hard for me. I mean, the endless amount of business—other people's business—which I have always done and cannot give up. I need help, and my friend here"—laying her hand on Uncle Gordon's as he sat beside her sofa—alas, she was almost always lying down now!—"has promised to help me."

"I am so glad—so glad!"

Perhaps she thought from my eagerness that I had meant something different from what she meant, for the faintest possible flush crossed her cheek, and died out again.

"He is going to be my man of business; to look into all my affairs; to undertake all my correspondence, with Jack as his lieutenant and working secretary. He will be always ready to give me his advice, and see that I am not cheated, and that I don't cheat anybody—an onerous duty. In fact, as I said, he will take care of me."

"And in return," added Major Gordon, with a touch of his old pride, "Miss Trotter wishes to give me—and being a poor man I am content to accept—a regular salary, a much larger salary than I think I deserve. We called you in, Decie, to decide the point."

"It seems we need a mutual friend in this, if in nothing else," said Miss Tommy, gayly; and she laid the disputed question before me; in which, of course, I decided for her, and against Uncle Gordon.

"It is no use fighting against two women, and one of them with such a strong will of her own," said he, smiling, and turning to Miss Tommy—it was one of the prettiest things in the relation between these two to see how they sometimes made fun of each other's peculiarities—"so I submit."

"That is right, and Decie knows it is right. She is a

very sensible woman. But indeed it matters little, between you and me; we quite understand one another, do we not?"

"My dear, yes!" he answered, softly. That was the only difference in his manner to her, which, always so courteous, had now in it a touch of reverent tenderness, such as he showed to no one else. And when they were by themselves, or with only me, he called her not "Miss Trotter," but "Dear," or "My dear," with an intonation such as I have heard between people who had been fifty years married.

Thus all was settled; and it was likewise settled that we should live half the year at Dover, in our three separate habitations, but that when we went for the summer to Sycamore Hall we should practically become one family—"my family," as Miss Trotter affectionately called us, saying what a pride it was to have a family in her solitary old age.

I think the next few years were the happiest she had ever known. She often said so, looking into my eyes with a wistful tenderness—the tenderness of those who know one another's secrets, yet never speak of them, even between themselves. Yes, she was perfectly happy, even though she had her sufferings—the inevitable physical sufferings of declining years, which perhaps the old bear better from knowing that they are inevitable, that there is no way out of them except through "the grave and gate of death," as the Prayer-Book says. How much or how little she thought of that, or of the "joyful resurrection" with a new body, but (oh, God grant it!) with the same soul, I could not tell. She had little need to talk of the heavenly life; she lived it here on earth.

Uncle Gordon had his sufferings too, but they were

not those of weakness. His iron constitution recovered itself; he bade fair to become a hale and hearty septuagenarian or octogenarian. Cheerful, too, in spite of his blindness, which never became total darkness. In our happy domestic circle the deadened heart of him burst out into full flower, late but lovely, "like a Glastonbury thorn," as I sometimes said. But there was nothing of the thorn-tree about him. He was more like a holly, which loses all its prickles as it nears the top.

And he was the best of uncles to Charlie and me and our boys—we had three now, so that the clan Gordon was not likely to end. Miss Trotter delighted in them and petted them all, but none was to her like her own Charles Everett the third, whom I generally let her have all to herself, that he might grow up as perfect as "old maids' children" are said to be. Though, as Charlie sometimes observed, it seemed "funny" to call Miss Tommy an old maid—she, that was a sort of mother to everybody who needed one. Her motherliness was her strong characteristic. Many grown-up people now living owe their life, health, education—all that makes existence worth having—to that childless woman, who never had a baby of her own on her lonely breast.

But she was happy—I know she was. Her empty heart was filled, her anxious spirit at rest. She, who all her life had suffered and labored for others, now enjoyed her Sabbath of peace. She saw of "the travail of her soul," and was satisfied.

Our last winter at Dover was, I rejoice to remember, the brightest we ever spent there. A faint, cold fear, which had long hung over us, that my husband might be ordered on foreign service, was dispelled by his consenting to retire on half-pay, which Miss Trotter earnestly desired.

"Don't leave me, Decie," she said, with a pathetic entreaty, the full meaning of which I understood afterward. "Don't any of you leave me for very long at a time."

We never did. Uncle Gordon, for one, was never absent from her a single day—not merely for her sake, either. Feeble as she was, he seemed as if he could not do without her—her clear head, her bright, brave heart. He himself was wonderfully well and strong, looking years younger than his real age, taking a firm hold of life still, and, as "man of business" to the rich Miss Trotter, able to make such a good use of it. He liked the work too; it interested him, and exercised all his dormant energies. He never now complained of having nothing to do, and, indeed, was becoming a remarkable instance of how much even a blind man can do if he tries.

"How well it has all turned out, Decie, since the day when you and I stood together on that Admiralty Pier and watched the boat come in!"

We were standing, she and I, I remember, at the window of her parlor; I with my last baby asleep on my shoulder, and she watching silently her well-beloved sea. Also watching Uncle Gordon, who was "taking his constitutional," as he called it—marching up and down the little jetty, upright as an arrow, and evidently enjoying himself exceedingly.

"How well he looks, how strong he is!" I said. "Never was there a man so changed."

"Yes!" she answered, with a smile, and suddenly turned and kissed me—or, rather, the baby—with her eyes full of tears. Then added, "I have had such a happy life! Happier altogether, I think, than that of most women. And I thank God."

We stood a little while longer, until she noticed how strong the wind was blowing, and how thin Uncle Gordon's coat was.

"He forgets how keen our Dover east winds are in March. He fancies himself as young as ever; and yet he is"—with a little low laugh of complete content—"we are both of us getting really old. No, that coat won't do, Decie. I must speak to him about it to-morrow."

"That to-morrow"—she was away! I say "away," for I never could feel it like death. We found her next morning, asleep, apparently, with her hands clasped on her breast; as she once told me she generally went to sleep—"it felt so like saying one's prayers." But she was away—quite away.

She had died, as she must have long known she probably would die, of the heart disease which so often follows rheumatic fever. All her affairs were left clear, down to the minutest item. She had more than once said that a sudden death was the happiest of all—and she had it. Her great fear—that of living to be a burden upon others—she thus escaped. But her last thought was of other people—of him; for I found written on the little slate which always lay on her dressing-table, as a slight help in the endless small things she had daily to remember—"Mem.—To speak about Major Gordon's coat to morrow."

. . . . . .

When Miss Trotter's will was read it was found that, many years ago, she had left half her fortune to Charles Everett Gordon. By a later codicil she left him the whole, with reversion to his nephew and great-nephew. Except some charitable annuities, and one or two small

memorial legacies, she left it to him absolutely, without restrictions—"certain that he will use it as well as it can possibly be used."

He did. For a time I thought this was impossible—that he would never be himself again, the blow struck him so very hard. At first he seemed paralyzed by it, then for weeks he wandered about aimlessly, scarcely noticing any of us, looking always for some one else, whom he could never find. But gradually he rose up and faced his work—*her* work, which she had left him to do—and did it faithfully to the end.

Uncle Gordon lived to be a very old man—winning age's best blessings—

"Honor, love, obedience, troops of friends,"

—friends whom he helped to make happy, as his wealth enabled him to do. But he himself retained his simple, almost ascetic, habits. Many a time I had to look after him and change his shabby coat for a new one—remembering, with the sacredness that death casts over the commonest things, that last thoughtfulness of the woman who loved him, as, he knew now, no one else had ever loved him in all this world.

He never forgot her; sometimes for months he scarcely mentioned her name, but I was sure he never forgot her. And often, when his day's work was done, he would lean back in his arm-chair with a tired look, and sit long silent—a silence that none of us ever ventured to break.

We had buried her, by her own written desire, at Dover—in St. James's churchyard, which was overlooked by Mrs. Wilson's house, where, whenever we went there, Uncle Gordon always took up his old quar-

ters. Once he drew me to the window: it was a moonlight night, and the white gravestones were shining, and the trees waving, especially the tree in a corner we knew well, just under the gray church-tower.

"Tell me, Decie, is it all right?—the marble cross and the flowers? She was so fond of flowers."

I told him it was a perfect little garden. Not only we, but everybody, seemed to take care of it.

"Yes. Everybody loved her," he said.

After a little I drew down the blind, and made his fireside comfortable for him—the solitary fireside where he would sometimes sit, quite alone and doing nothing, all evening long. Then, as I led him to his arm-chair, he suddenly whispered, catching my hand and grasping it hard:

"Decie, when my time comes—remember—beside her."

I have remembered.

THE END.

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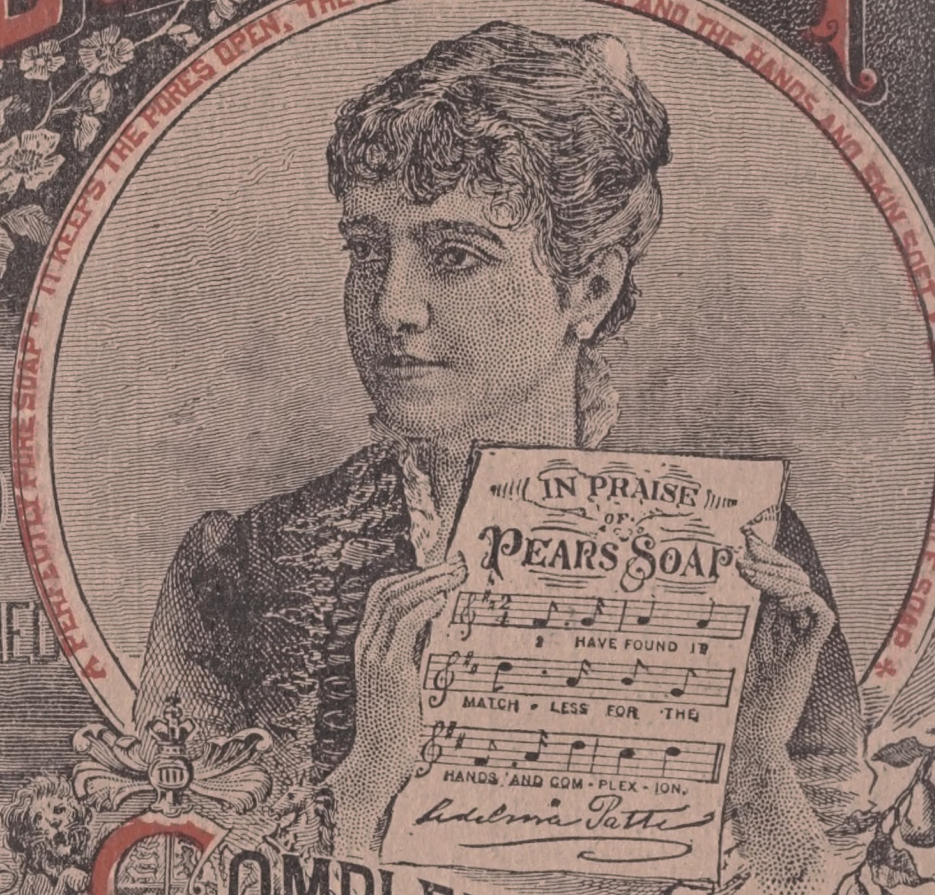
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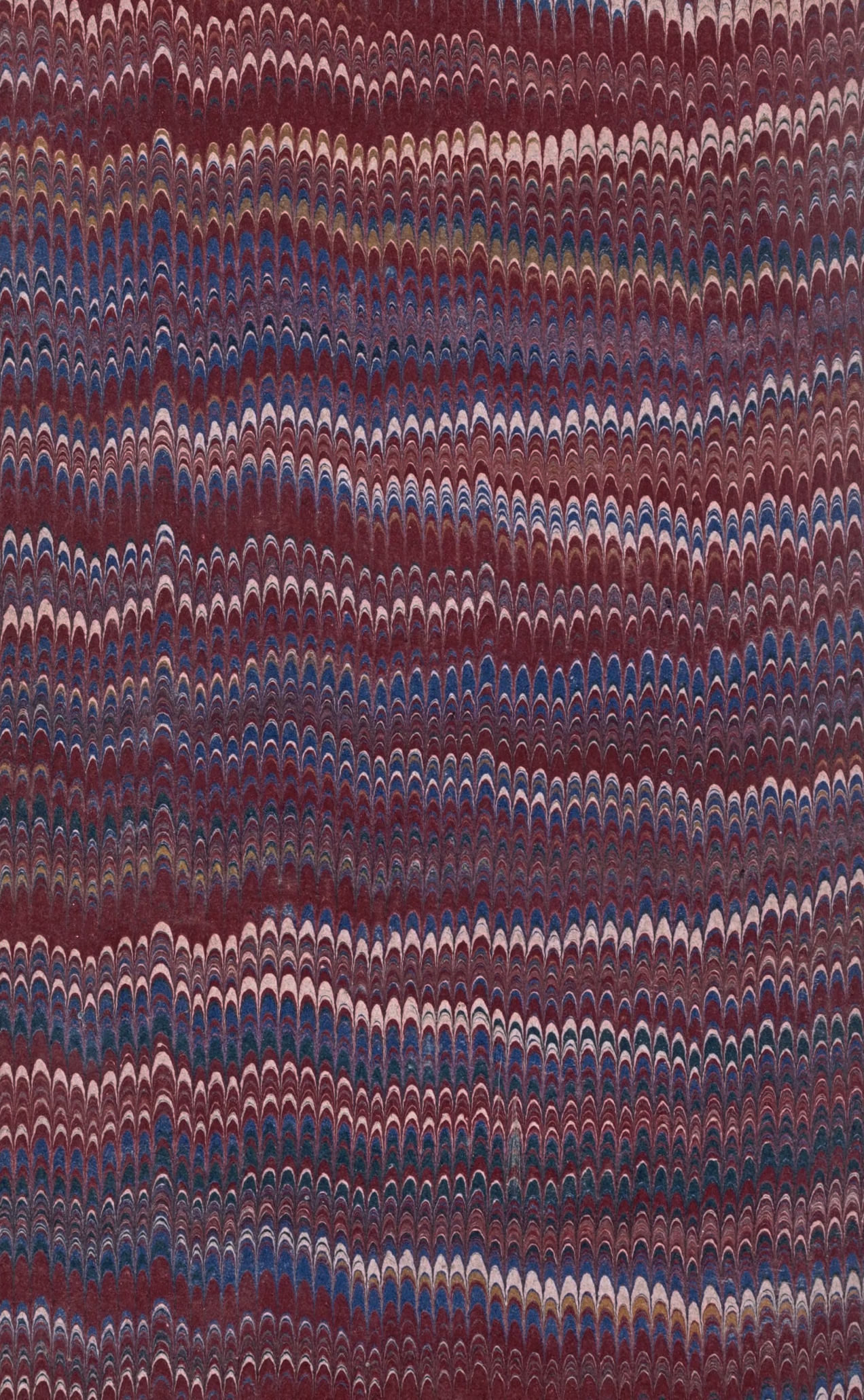

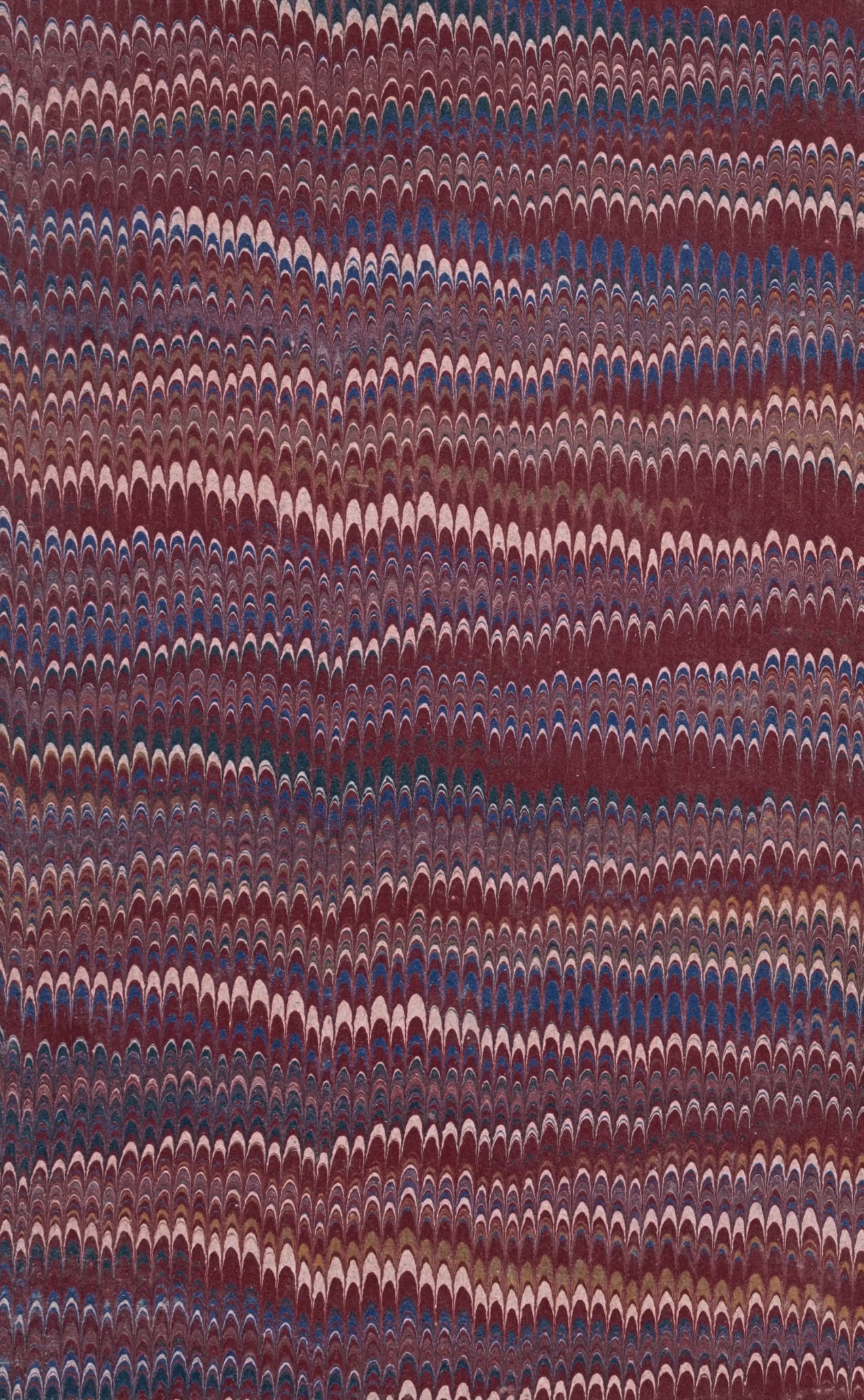

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